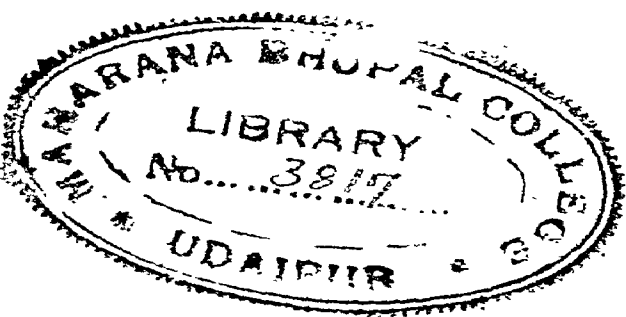


RECENT PROSE

by

John Masefield



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NOTE

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J. M.

CONTENTS

The Taking of Helen	<i>page</i> 1
Letters	105
Play-Writing	117
Fox-Hunting	159
John M. Synge	181

RECENT PROSE



THE TAKING OF HELEN

NIREUS was the son of the King of Symé Island. At his birth the gods brought gifts to him, each one thing; one wisdom, another courage, another skill. They gave him all good gifts except the gift of luck in love.

That they forgot, or thought it wise to leave,
Since men grow proud when nothing makes them
grieve.

Nireus grew up to be a young man of every beauty and every grace.

Helen was born on the mainland. At her birth the goddesses brought gifts to her, of loveliness and sweetness. They gave her all good gifts, and this gift, too, that all men who saw her should love her, except her husband. She grew up to be the most beautiful woman who has ever lived. Menelaus, the King of Sparta, married her, and took her to live in his palace. He was an elderly man who cared not for her, but for drinking by the fire with the old Kings his friends.

Paris was the son of the King of Troy. At his birth the gods brought gifts to him of grace and courage and skill; and this gift, too, they gave him, that all beautiful women should love him,

even if it led to tears and death. He grew up to be a fine young man but a wanderer. He came to Symé in his wanderings and there became the friend of Nireus, so that the proverb began : "Nireus and Paris, the Eyes of Youth." This was said because they were lovely and alike and together. Paris was swifter of foot and a better archer than Nireus, but Nireus could run longer. Old men have said that together they were handsomer than two young stallions coming out of the forest in the morning.

After he had stayed with Nireus, Paris came to the court of King Menelaus, as all men did then, either to learn arms or to see Helen. It was deep peace in the world then, and had been for the seventy years of the life of Menelaus.

Now being in the Court of King Menelaus, Paris loved Queen Helen and she him, as the wise gods had foreseen. He courted her with his youth and grace, and also with gifts from Troy, of gold and scarlet.

Helen loved him again, for, as they say in the islands, the rose turns towards the rose, not to the onion.

There were many young men at the Court at that time. Euphorion the painter was among them. He made the heads of Paris and Helen in coloured wax.

And at this time Prince Nireus came to the

The Taking of Helen

Court of Sparta. He, too, fell in love with Helen, but hopelessly, because Paris was there. He saw how Paris wooed her and how she loved him in return ; his heart was sorrowful. He used to wander near the palace at night watching the lights in her windows and thinking his heart out to her.

And though he longed to kill his friend Paris, he could not, because he knew that she loved him.

Many of the young men there were in love with Helen. They were jealous of Paris. Some of them spread tattle abroad, which came to Menelaus' ears.

And Menelaus, little, old and bald,
Peered after Helen with his ferret's eyes,
And cackled at his jokes and thought them wise,
And scratched his head because he had the scald.

One day Paris came to Nireus and asked him if he would lend him a ship, to take him out of the country in three days' time. Nireus said that he had a ship at the Green Havens which could take him. Paris thanked him, and asked him to keep the sailing secret.

As the ship-master was at the Court, waiting for orders, Nireus told him to be ready to sail within three days.

It was the summer season, when the moth
By dewy moonrise to the musk-rose go'th.
It was a waning moontime ; the moon's hull
Sailed late to heaven, three days from her full.

That night as Nireus was wandering in the castle gardens, watching the windows and eating out his heart, he heard his name called, and there in the darkness was Queen Helen come to seek him. She said, " Nireus, I have watched you and think that you will be my friend ; now be my friend and do what I ask of you."

He said, " Lady, anything that I can do for you, I will do."

She said, " Will you secretly cause one of your ships to be at the Green Havens at midnight three nights from now, ready to sail ? "

He said, " One is there already ready to sail. Who shall sail in her ? "

She said, " I shall, Nireus ; for I cannot live here longer."

He said, " Lady, forgive me, but I think you will not be sailing alone."

She said, " No, Nireus, I shall sail with Paris ; so there are our two lives in your hand."

He said, " Lady, a friend of yours is as yourself to me. But Green Havens is nearly twenty miles from here, over the moors ; you will want horses to ride thither."

The Taking of Helen

She said, "Paris has arranged for horses. We shall slip out of the castle at dusk and ride to Green Havens, and go on board and to sea."

"Lady," he said, "Love guard you, for I see that wisdom does not. But I am your friend, O my God."

She said, "I knew that you were a good man from your face."

He said, "Lady, I would that I could say something or do something to turn your heart from what you plan, for that might serve you; but since I cannot, I will do this; even to the death. I am a coin for you; spend me as you will."

Just at that moment there came the noise of men in armour; it was the guard going round with lanterns. By the light of the lanterns Nireus could see Menelaus coming from the feast with the captain of the guard. He put his cloak about Helen and drew her back among the flowers so that she might not be recognised.

That was the only time that he held her in all the time of his loving.

Five miles north along the coast from Green Havens is a brook's mouth in a bay sheltered from the north and east by rocks. Nireus had a second ship in this bay, loading timber. Early the next morning Nireus sent orders to the captain of this ship also to be ready to sail.

At the feast in the Court that night it seemed

Recent Prose

to Nireus that Menelaus was smiling. Menelaus was a little, elderly, precise man with a cunning face and grey beard. Nireus saw him at the feast licking his lips over a secret.

"Come, cousin Paris," Menelaus said, "come, sit by me and drink to our friendship. And what lovely lady is the lucky one, cousin Paris?"

So he had Paris beside him at the high table and drank to him, talked to him in his high voice, in his silly manner, and at parting hugged him and clapped him on the shoulder.

After dark that night Nireus walked in the garden. He heard Roseflower, one of the queen's women, talking to Fragrance her friend. "Queen or no queen," Roseflower said, "she is no better than any of us, and the King ought to know it."

"Poor lady," Fragrance said, "you'd not betray her?"

"No, I don't say I would, but I ought to."

Nireus went to the court-armourer for a sword-chain that had needed a new link. While he was there Paris passed by; the armourer saw him by the firelight.

"Is Prince Paris a friend of yours, Prince?" the armourer asked. "If he be, Prince, say this: Kings' wives are dangerous."

"How, dangerous?"

"Kings may be glad of a good excuse for a quarrel."

The Taking of Helen

“ Prince Paris gives no excuse.”

“ Then tell him not to leave gloves behind him. Tell him to draw the curtains in the little third room in the tower.”

“ Speak plainly,” Nireus said.

“ I do plainly,” the armourer said.

“ Take my advice and use my shields,
And you'll be spared on battlefields.”

Nireus went to the court of the guard to watch the setting of the guard. In the guard-room a soldier was singing as he scoured his greaves :

“ Who would not be a prince from Troy,
The only joy of lovely queens ?
And who would mind gloves left behind,
Since Kings are things,
Since Kings are things
With no suspicion what it means ? ”

Other soldiers laughed at this.

At this moment one of the courtiers, whom they called Brighteyes, came to Nireus with a message.

“ Prince Nireus, His Majesty the King would be glad to have a word with you in the Rooms of Report.”

“ Do you know what he wants, Brighteyes ? ”

“ He is giving out the pinks for courtesy and the stars for nobleness.”

Recent Prose

"No, but what does he want?"

"You."

Nireus went to the Rooms of Report. They were in a secret part of the castle where Menelaus saw his spies. There were three rooms; in the outer one, a guard or officer, in the middle one, nobody, and in the inner room, the King. When Nireus went up there was no officer in the outer room to announce his arrival. Nireus went into the middle room; there was nobody there, but the door into the innermost room was slightly ajar. King Menelaus was there, with others. Nireus drew back, to wait till he could be announced and received. Menelaus was sitting at a table and drumming on it with his fingers. Nireus heard him speak to someone.

"What is your report?" he said.

When the man answered, Nireus started, because the voice was that of a young man who was Paris's servant.

"Forgive my speaking low, lord," the man said, "but my news is so important that I dare not trust it above a whisper." Nireus heard him bend low and whisper for a minute on end right into Menelaus' ear. He could not catch more than a few words of the message. "She said that she was sure of it." "I could not hear what he said, but he changed colour." "She was seen picking the rose."

The Taking of Helen

"And the rose was on his table this evening, was it?" Menelaus said.

"O, a rose like it, my lord."

"How like it?"

"It was the deep yellow rose, lord, almost a red yellow, that only grows near the postern."

"And it was on his table?"

"One like it was, my lord."

"Was it?"

The spy mumbled on with his report, but Nireus could not catch more of it than a few scattered words.

Presently Menelaus rose from his chair to walk up and down the room. In his hand he had a pomander which he kept tossing and catching.

"But only the two horses?" he said suddenly.

"Yes, my lord, only the two."

"From the Two Brothers inn?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Good."

There was a silence after this for a little while, then the spy seemed to be dismissed by some inner door.

When he had gone, Menelaus went to the window of the room, looked out into the dusk, and began to bite on his pomander. He had a way of smacking his lips on it whenever his thoughts pleased him. While he was smacking

his lips over it, another man, who had not spoken until then, asked "How the business went?"

"I think they have it planned," Menelaus said "for the night after to-morrow."

"What steps are you taking?" the other asked. He seemed to be a heavy man with a difficulty in breathing.

"I think," Menelaus said, "I think that it will not be very satisfactory for them."

"It seems all to fit in, like the stones in a wall," the heavy man said. "I have owed Priam a trouble for these twenty years; now his young puppy shall pay me."

"We have all owed Priam a trouble," Menelaus said. "But we shall pay him full measure."

"How were they planning to leave the country?"

"I imagine by a ship from Green Havens, belonging to this boy Nireus, who is here."

"Is he in their plot?"

"No. Paris's man thinks that Nireus hates Paris and wants him away from here."

"I do not wonder at that; he seems an insufferable young puppy, by what I have seen and heard."

"Nireus is no better."

"It will be good for these islanders and for all these other petty lords, that they learn who is their master."

The Taking of Helen

"They will learn very soon," Menelaus said. "Paris will be stopped when he goes, and tried and hanged the next morning. What we think of Paris and his attempt will be told to Priam within ten days, and versions of it will be everywhere at the same time. Knowing Priam as we do, we can count on war within three weeks."

"I have been seeing those men," the heavy man said, "those men we talked of, from over there" (here he made some motion of direction with his head). "Some of them may be inclined to be perverse. There are wild ideas of independence abroad; they may need the strong hand."

"No, no," Menelaus said. "Do not beat the donkey; show him the corn. There will be booty in this. I am arranging that all those fellows shall know that there will be booty. What with some men's fears and other men's lusts, we shall have no trouble."

"There are one or two men," the heavy man said, "who need a little trouble."

"No, I think not," Menelaus said. "But if there should be such, there will be time enough later."

The heavy man shifted nearer to Menelaus and whispered to him. Nireus could not catch what was said, but guessed that a thing so secret must be evil indeed. Menelaus seemed not pleased with the thing suggested. He seemed to debate

it, while he rubbed his chin with his left thumb in a way he had.

"And then we should put in one of our own men," the heavy man went on, aloud, "because his son is only a child."

Menelaus was thoughtful, but did not answer. The heavy man went on with his persuasions.

"It is the only way to deal with such. He is a crafty one, and nothing binds him, neither word nor bond."

"He can be tempted," Menelaus said.

* * * * *

Nireus now drew away to the outer room, because both men were on their feet. The officer or guard returned to the outer room from his supper. He was an old, fat officer known as Wisdom. He announced Nireus to the King.

"Nireus," the King said, "they tell me that you run long distances. I have betted on your running twelve furlongs, to-morrow morning, against the stag-footed, the grandson of Aktor. Will you do this?"

"Lord, I will try, but he is a better runner than I. Where shall we run?"

"In the running-place at Port-of-Maidens."

"That is fifteen miles to the south of this?"

"Does that dismay you? We shall go there to-night."

“ To-night ? ”

“ When the north wind rises. You, an islander, do not mind the sea ? It will not affect your running ? I have betted much upon you, because I hear that you outran Prince Paris.”

“ Only in the longer courses, lord.”

“ Yes,” the heavy man answered, “ Prince Paris will not stay for the longer courses.” There was something very puffy, and slow, and grey-in-the-face about the heavy man, but there was beauty too. He wore the Blood Axe, as a sign, upon his vestments.

“ Lord,” Nireus said, “ since we sail at midnight, may I go to prepare ? ”

“ My men will do that for you,” the King said. “ In fact, have done it. We will eat a little fruit and so aboard. You run only the longer distances. Ah, when I was young, I used to run ; the short dashes, eighty yards, one hundred yards, even the furlong. Once, when I was about your age, I raced Aktor himself at the Holy Games and beat him. You remember that ? ”

“ Aktor was old, then,” the heavy man said, “ as well as unfit to run. He had a fever and should not have run. I was with him before the race and urged him not to run. No man ever beat Aktor in the dash. The fever and old age and heaviness beat him.”

“ I took Aktor’s crown,” Menelaus said. “ He

had a bigger head than mine, so that I could not wear it. The crowns at the Games were then of rosemary. I have it still, within there. Ah, come in, there. Here is the fruit ; a little salad of grape-thinnings. Sit you here, Nireus, and eat a little fruit, for it is wholesome and good for the wind. Eat but a little dish of this, with a cup of wine, and you will beat Aktor's grandson by twenty yards."

"He will not beat Aktor's grandson," the heavy man said. "A good runner has a set of the spine and a breadth in the nose, for the drawing of his wind, which this young fellow, nice lad as he is, has not."

As they ate and drank, King Menelaus talked of grapes, and of wines, and of foreign wines and of foreign ports, and of wonders, and of goddesses, and of forest goddesses, and so to Paris of Troy, who had seen the forest goddesses.

"He is one of those," the King said, "who see the goddesses."

"Yes, lord, so it is said."

"It is said that he says that one of the goddesses had golden hair and that he share off a lock from it, and that he keeps the immortal hair about him, and that it glimmers in the dark."

~ "Truly, lord?"

~ "You are his friend. Did he never show it to you?"

The Taking of Helen

"Never, lord."

Here the captain of the King's ship came to say that the wind was already hawering and would soon be steady, if they would go aboard.

"Come, Nireus," the King said. "Give me your arm, we will go on board together. By the way, my lad, have you lost such a thing as a pair of gloves?"

"No, lord," Nireus said.

"Not a pair of scarlet gloves, with gold on them?"

"Never, lord."

"They have gold roses on them, worked in marvellous golden hair. The hair is so fine, it is fit for a queen or for a goddess. It glimmers in the dark. Do you never wear gloves?"

"Yes, lord, when I drive and when I box."

"Do you know what my father, who was a very wise man, used to say, Nireus, about leaving things about?"

"No, lord."

"He said, 'I leave people about, soldiers, even my queen, about. I can get others. But I do not leave things about, for when they go, they are gone.' I do as he says, Nireus. I do not leave gloves about."

They went on board the King's ship, the "Scatterer," and at once sailed for Port-of-Maidens. On the way and all night long until the

morning, Nireus wondered how he could warn his beloved of the death that was drawing near to her. But he could send no message, since Menelaus had him to sleep in the King's Room. In the morning there were games at Port-of-Maidens, of swimming, leaping, boxing, wrestling and the running of men. Nireus ran against the grandson of Aktor, who beat him by twenty yards, over twelve furlongs.

After the racing, Nireus bathed in the sea, wondering how he could send a message to his beloved. He had heard the King say that they would not return to the palace till the morning, but stay to feast and to sleep at Port-of-Maidens. On the beach there were some fishers who had been racing their boats. They had starfish, sponges, and rayed shells. One of them had a rayed shell twisted the left-hand way.

"Friend," Nireus said, "if I buy this of you, will you sail with it at once and bring it to the hands of Queen Helen? I am Nireus of Symé, and I will give you each a milch-goat for the journey, and, for the shell, a silver cup set with crystals. My steward, who is at the palace, will pay you."

"Take it," one of the men said.

"But at the palace they will not let me come to the Queen?"

"Then leave it for her, to be taken to her at once."

The Taking of Helen

"What message am I to take with it?"

Nireus with his knife scratched in small upon the shell the arrow-head and dot which is the danger-mark of the Beggars. He knew that Helen knew this, because he had shown it to her, when they had been talking of marks, a few days before.

"Show her this mark, and say that Nireus of Symé sends the shell, as a most rare thing, to her who is peerless."

"It is a rare thing," one of the fishers said. "We draw up shells nearly every day, but never before have we drawn one twisted as that."

"Queens have ruled men ever since men were children," Nireus said, "but never before has a queen like Queen Helen ruled. The unmatched shall go to the unequalled."

The fishers ran their boat into the sea, and stood in the sea beside her, while one of the men packed the shell in a frail. "Lord," this man said, "we have a saying among ourselves, 'Give the shell to the woman, but eat the fish yourself!'"

"Give this shell to the woman," Nireus said, "and you shall eat meat and drink wine, on the faith of a King's son."

As the boat set sail King Menelaus came down the beach to speak to Nireus.

"Nireus," he said, "you may be weary from running, but you are young. I have betted that you will run once more, a race of a mile, with

our friend Brighteyes, who has just arrived from our Court. There he is. Take him aside and arrange conditions with him."

Nireus was glad to see Brighteyes, because he might have news of Helen.

"What news at Court, Brighteyes?" he asked.

"I have not been at Court since morning," Brighteyes said. "The Queen and all of us went over this morning to The Curlews, old Lord Halys's place, in the hills there, about eight miles from here. They will feast and sleep there."

"And not be at the palace to-night?"

"No, nor to-morrow night. Lord Halys sent over to fetch them. You are looking very white; do you think you ought to be running?"

"Yes, indeed. Is there a road to Lord Halys's?"

"Yes, a good straight track of turf leading over the hill there, past those beeches."

"Is Prince Paris also at Lord Halys's?"

"Constant as a wasp to the peach, or as a moth to the lantern."

The Taking of Helen

a mile, Nireus tried to slip away from the company, but the King brought him back to the guest-house. "You must stay for the feast," he said. "It is now about to begin, since the sun is setting. Come, sit by me, at the feast. We have here at the feast a strange thing which you shall see, a rayed shell, twisted the left-hand way ; see, there, the strange shell, brought to me by some fishermen. It is marked by a mark like a bird's beak and eye, which some men say is the mark of the Egyptians, others the mark of rarity, others the mark of him who found it. What mark should you say it is ? "

"The mark of Nireus of Symé, lord, who sent this shell to your Queen to-day, as a strange thing, that might please her."

The King leaned across the table and broke the shell with his knife.

"Let us see," he said, "whether there be any little fish within the shell. No fish ? See, now, we have broken a rarity but learned the truth. There is no little left-hand fish within the left-hand cover."

After the feast was at an end, some young men danced to them ; then a poet sang to them, about the killing of the corn. While he was singing, Nireus edged away through the crowd to the door. After the song, King Menelaus said, "Let us now talk about marks, especially about the

mark of Nireus of Symé, which is like a bird's beak and eye, and of such importance that it is cut upon rarities."

Nireus did not wait to talk about marks, but slipped from the door into the darkness, and along the street to the field where the horses stood at manger. He took the first that came handy, a little brown Argos mare, all kicking mad from the cold. He bridled her and swung her round and set off upon her up the hill for the Curlews.

Under the moon the downland lay in seas ;
The brown mare kindled to it ; at her tread
The beetles of the grasses rose like bees
To boom beside their bodies as they sped.

Three miles from Port-of-Maidens, Nireus came to a six-ways, where a dismounted man holding a resty horse, was trying to read the sign on the ground.

" Here," the man said, " which way to Port-of-Maidens ? "

" Straight on to the south, with the lump of the hill to your right."

" Is the King there ? "

" Yes. Which way to Lord Halys's ? "

" Straight to the north. Keep up on the hill, don't go down."

" Is the Queen there ? "

The man was already riding and swearing at

his horse, but he turned and shouted something which sounded like "They'll tell you there." Nireus set off "straight to the north." In half an hour he saw the long white walls of Lord Halys's stables, and the house, with lit windows, above them. The dogs were barking in the kennels, as though wolves were about, but above the noise of the dogs Nireus heard the jingling of a troop of horse, trotting down into the valley to the east.

At Lord Halys's door there was a confusion of coming and going. Somebody hailed Nireus as a messenger from the King.

"I am not a messenger from the King," he said, "but I have a word for the Queen: may I see her?"

"See her? We do not know where she is."

"Surely she is here?"

"She was here. After supper she disappeared."

"Surely you know where she is?"

"Nobody knows. The escort is beating the hills. Lord Halys is distracted. She was seen going down the path to the Great Stones, three hours ago, and no one has seen her since."

"Was she alone?"

"She was alone when she was seen, but there is another who has disappeared, the Prince Paris, and now no one knows what to think."

"They have not been killed, have they?"

"The gods forbid. First, there was supper;

then, after supper, there was to be singing, for musicians had come and were waiting. Then, when all had waited, Lord Halys's daughter went to bring the Queen, but she had gone. But, lord, this has distracted us all. Will you not alight and eat and drink ? Here is wine at least."

As Nireus dismounted to drink, a man came rapidly up to the door. " Here is the farmer's wife from Fair Oaks," he said, " who says that there was a chariot with two horses waiting for half an hour in the river bed below the Stones. She saw it during supper time, as she came to the house with butter, and again half an hour later, as she went home. Two dark horses with a dark chariot. They were eating corn while tethered, and no one was with them. She says that she would know one of the horses because it wove as it ate."

" I will tell you what has happened," Nireus said. " This is the work of thieves or pirates, who have carried off the two to ransom."

" That is what we thought, lord, at the first ; but there are no thieves nor pirates here. There have not been for years ; not since our King was a prince."

" Did any message come to the Queen, to call her from supper, or after supper ; some word to bring her out of doors ? "

" None, that we can hear of."

" Nor to the Prince ? "

"Nobody knows."

"Which way are the soldiers seeking?"

"Down the track to Green Havens, and some up on the hills. We have sent to tell the King. God help our old Lord Halys; nothing like this has ever happened to him before. To lose a guest is to lose God."

"Are there any other tracks to the sea, by which pirates might come and go?"

"There are no pirates in this," a soldier said as he went past, "but a young man and his trollop and a moony night."

Nireus said, "I will go join the seekers. What other tracks to the sea are there?"

"Old tracks across the mountains that lead to the valleys. Green Havens is east from this, the next valley leads to Port Phenice, and the one beyond to Springs Bay."

"And how far? How many miles?"

"As many as God pleases, lord; it is all wild hill and rock; many who go out there at night are drowned in the bogs; and some are eaten by devils."

Nireus rode down to the river bed where the chariot had waited, but could learn little there, since the soldiers had ridden out the sign. "Those two have had a warning," he thought, "and have fled. Now they are riding by one of these byways to Green Havens, straight to death, to where

Recent Prose

Menelaus expects them. I must go off by these byways and try to find them and head them off."

He rode a track into the mountains until the track gave out and then rode by the stars until the mist came down.

In the mist's silences he wandered then
To dropping alders in a dripping glen,
Thence into forest, dense with mist, and mute
Save for the dropping dew and pine-tree fruit.
There the mare stiffened, trembled and stopped
dead ;

A startled vixen crossed her path and fled.

"Someone has startled that fox," Nireus thought ; " I wonder who."

He listened intently, but heard nothing, save the splashing of drops in the woods. A bird, scared by his lingering, went from a bush near him with a little cry and a creak of feathers. He seemed to be in a wilderness at the end of the world, where even light failed. His mare stumbled on a few feet further, and then stopped dead, nor could he budge her. Whether she felt, smelt, saw or heard something, he could not tell. Possibly she was scared by the smell of the fox ; or had had enough of it. He turned her adrift and walked on.

After he had wandered on downhill for half an hour, he came to a thicket where the ground

The Taking of Helen

was soft. Somewhere in the thicket a hurt beast was whimpering ; it stopped when it heard him, but presently cried again, as though the pain had overcome all instincts ; then, as he drew nearer to it, in the bog, it changed its tone, as a hurt beast will, so that he did not know whereabouts in the thicket it lay. Now it seemed ahead, then to a side, then even behind him, and this in a darkness, on a giving ground, which made him think of what the man had said, how some were swallowed in bogs and others eaten by devils.

He skirted the thicket and went on till suddenly he came to a kind of track across his line. He turned down it, out of woodland, into a space of bush and grass, where there was a noise of horses wrenching at their pasture. The horses were almost within reach before he saw them. They moved from him with a rattling of rein on wood that showed him that they were harnessed to a chariot. They were dark brown horses, and as he caught them and held them, he saw that one of them wove. They were cool to the touch, as though they had not been driven for more than an hour. One was bare. Over the other a soft cloak was dragging. The cloak was faintly scented with Queen Helen's favourite scent of verbena leaf. In one corner he could feel the Queen's device, of The Swan, done in gold. Plainly the runaways had been there, perhaps were there still.

"Paris," he called, "Paris! Are you there, Paris?"

There was no answer, nor any sound, nor any sight, but the night dark with the change of morning. There were no tracks that he could read, no guide, nothing to go by. The runaways had been there and had left the horses deliberately, with time to think of the horses, since here was one of them covered with a cloak. They had come so far without disaster, but how long before had they come there, and where were they now?

"Paris," he called, "Paris!"

There was no answer, yet Nireus felt that Paris must be there, since how could he have gone on in the dark, with Helen, without horses?

"Paris," he called again. "Are you there, Paris? I am Nireus."

Having no answer, he climbed into the chariot and drove on along the track, which was littered with stones among which sage had sprouted; the horses crushed the sage till the air was full of the smell. He went on thus for a mile or more.

Then suddenly the track darkened ahead to a clump of trees, the horses whinnied and were challenged, a light shone, soldiers came out from the trees on both sides of the track and stopped his chariot.

"Is this the way to Green Havens?" Nireus asked.

The Taking of Helen

"You're an islander by your speech," an officer said, "who are you?"

"I am Nireus of Symé."

"What brings you here at this time of night?"

"I have been with friends, and am driving back to my ship, now lying at Green Havens. I have been lost all night among these hills."

"What friends have you been with?"

"They were at the big white farm in the hills to the west, the Curlews."

"Does anybody here know any farm in the hills of that name?"

"Yes, sir," said one of the soldiers. "It lies up near the lake, a matter of ten miles from here. Old Lord Halys owns it."

"That is the place," Nireus said.

"I was born up there, sir," the soldier said. "The shepherd's cottage was where my father lived."

"Why, your father was the shepherd, then?" Nireus said.

"Yes, sir. I expect you have heard tell of my father," the soldier said.

"Tell me," the officer said, "have you seen anything of a young man and woman since you were on the hills? A tall, slim man, of about your build, but with fair hair, and the girl the same?"

"No."

"That is what all say. Where have these two gone to?"

"Are you looking for a man and woman?" Nireus asked.

"Yes," the officer said, "we are, and we've got to have them."

"What wrong have they been doing?"

"That will be for others to prove."

"Will this track take me to Green Havens?" Nireus asked. "If it will, I had better be moving on."

"I don't know about that," the officer said. "My orders are to stop all passers, and you are a passer."

"But I shall lose the wind, it is beginning to fail now."

The officer hesitated. "I'm sorry," he said, "but orders must be obeyed. Wait a few minutes. The other troop will be here, then. You can apply to my chief. You see, this man and woman, we've got to have them. You'd better put your rugs over the horses; it's cold. Give us your rug."

"I'll do it," Nireus said. He climbed down and flung the Queen's cloak over the horses, so that the golden Swan could be tucked round a trace. Then he stood by his team and ran his hand down their legs, pulled their ears and made much of them. The soldiers stood about him, talking among themselves.

The soldier who had spoken about the Curlews edged shyly up to him.

The Taking of Helen

"I hope, sir," he said, "I hope Lord Halys is not going to sell the Curlews."

"He did not mention it to me," Nireus said.

"Well, he was going to, sir, as you know."

"Yes, but that was some time ago surely?"

"No, sir; only last month."

"Indeed. I had not heard that."

"Perhaps you have not seen his lordship for some time, sir?"

"No, not for some time; but from what I could make out, he did not mean to sell the Curlews. It is a fine property."

"Perhaps you have not tried to make a living off it, sir."

"No, I have not."

"Talking about Lord Halys, sir," another soldier said, "perhaps you could tell us which troop of the guard it is that he commands. Is it the Blue Troop or the Green?"

"The Green, isn't it?" Nireus asked.

"Surely, sir, you could tell us what coloured scarf he wears?"

"The gentleman is from the islands," the lad from the Curlews said, "perhaps he would not have noticed the scarf."

"Well, I say, myself," the other said, "that he commands the Blue Troop." He moved away sulkily to a little distance, from which he watched Nireus with disfavour.

"Horses are queer things," another soldier said. "They've each got a nature, if you understand what I mean. There's that horse of yours, sir, to take an instance now, he roots his head about as though he were dodging midges."

"That's weaving," the lad said. "When a horse does that, he is said to weave. And when a horse weaves, he is safe from being stolen, for it's like death or love, there's no cure for weaving."

"There's a cure for love," one of the soldiers said. "Run away with the lady for a month."

"That is the cure for folly," the lad from the Curlews said. "But nobody gets over love; it goes deep down and changes a man."

"It does," Nireus said.

"I was in love once," the soldier answered, "and at first I wanted to eat her; then, as my miss got uppish, I gave her one or two on the side of the head. That stopped her weaving; after that we got on better. Treat them rough, like you would dogs, and you won't ever suffer from love."

"Sir," the lad from the Curlews said to Nireus, "when you were at the Curlews, did you see Madame Fantasy, as they call her? Rather a big, brisk, bustling woman, with a bright colour?"

"No. Who is she?"

"She is the housekeeper there. She has made

The Taking of Helen

a lot of unpleasantness since she came into the house."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"Well, you know what Lord Halys is, sir."

"That is too true," Nireus said, wishing that it were.

There came a noise of horses from down the glen; in a minute or two the other troop had ridden up.

"Any luck, my lord?" said the officer who had spoken to Nireus.

"No. They're not at Port Phenice. There's no ship in Phenice. One sailed this afternoon, but that was too early for them. Who is this man in the cart?"

"He says he is going to Green Havens, from the Curlews, my lord, but lost his way, after the dinner."

"What is his name?"

"Nireus, my lord."

"Nireus! But that is a man we want. Where is he? Nireus." He turned to Nireus. "You are the owner of the ship now ready to sail in Green Havens?"

"Yes. I was going to sail in her."

"I know. You cannot. She is impounded. Certain people have disappeared and no ship is to sail till they are found. Have you seen anything of the people?"

"Nothing."

"Have you seen anyone to-night?"

"Not between leaving the Curlews and coming here."

"Well, I cannot think where they have disappeared to."

Here some more horsemen rode up, under the commandant of the three troops. The commandant knew Nireus and nodded to him.

"Seen anything of the runaways?"

"Nothing, lord."

"We've made a wide cast through the wood. They're not between this and the coast. We'll soon catch them when the day dawns, but in this darkness one can do nothing. It is a sad business, Nireus. The lady is the Queen and the man Count Paris: sheer madness. And she was pretty, too, in a way. He was a sort of friend of yours, I think?"

"Yes, a friend."

"I'm afraid it will stop your sailing for to-night. I've been riding all night. I'm weary."

He slid from his horse and stood by Nireus's horses, with his hand on Helen's cloak. Nireus could see his hand move up and down upon the cloak as though he were interested in its softness, yet had not pushed the thought further.

"This is a beautiful cloak," he said at last.
"It is soft enough for a lady's."

The Taking of Helen

"Yes, it is a soft cloak," Nireus said. "What will be done to the runaways when they are caught?"

"She will be immured, of course. He is to be hanged."

"With no trial or enquiry? There may be some explanation."

"Those are the orders. There's no explanation. She is married to an old man, and he has had his head turned. I wish that this dawn would come, so that we might see."

"May I be pushing on towards Green Havens, if this be the way? I have been up all night and would gladly rest in my ship."

"You give me your word that you do not know where these runaways are?"

"I give you my word. I do not know where they are."

"Well, you may go. Let Prince Nireus pass there."

"I beg your pardon, my lord," the officer called Short put in. "With all deference and respect, my lord, might not this gentleman have left the couple somewhere? You see, my lord, it is odd his coming here, at this time of night, to-night of all nights."

"You hear that, Nireus?" the commandant said.

"Yes," Nireus answered, "I give you my

word that I have not seen nor spoken with either of the couple for more than two days, that I know nothing of how they went nor whither, and that I do not know where they are now."

"Besides," another officer said, "you could not put three in that cart."

"True," Short answered, "but the third could have ridden, and then he could have hidden them."

There was a shifting among the troopers on the track.

"What is that noise in your troop, Short?" the commandant asked.

Short went to enquire, and then returned, leading a horse.

"A trooper, sir, has just come in with one of their horses. He came upon it loose in the wood just below here."

Nireus saw at a glance that it was the brown Argos mare which had carried him from Port-of-Maidens.

"There's the horse," Short said. "The man could have ridden and the lady driven in the cart with this gentleman."

"Why," Nireus said, "you can see that the horse is a runaway, marked with the Blood Axe, one of your own cavalry horses. If I be helping this couple to escape, and if these be our three horses, they must be close to this, where the

horses are. You have been through and through all these woods. Why haven't you come upon them?"

"Because you have hidden them," Short said.

"Wait one moment, lord," a rider said, pushing up to the lantern light. "This gentleman in the cart was at the Curlews about midnight, four or five hours after the people were missed. I heard him say that he would join the seekers. He asked what tracks to the sea there were, and people told him he would be lost if he tried to find them at night."

"What were you doing at the Curlews?" the commandant asked the man.

"I am employed there," the man said. "I'm one of the stud-men."

"Is there anyone here who can prove that?"

"I can, sir," the lad said. "I used to live at the Curlews and can remember him, well."

"Very good," the commandant answered. "I needed no such evidence, Nireus, but that answers you, Short."

"Very well, sir," Short said, "I've nothing more to say. And you'll understand, Lord Nireus, that my suspicions were my duty, nothing personal to yourself."

"Right, sir," Nireus said. "And you will understand that my indignation was due to an anxious night, and that I respect both your duty and yourself. And now may I be going?"

"You may; but this is not the way to Green Havens. You'll have to go down the way you came and turn to the right in the bottom. As a matter of form, will you report at my quarters at the inn, when you reach Green Havens?"

"I will."

Nireus turned his horses down the hill and leaned from the car to thank the stud-groom for his intervention.

"So it was you, sir," the stud-groom said, "it was you who had him after all."

"Had who?"

"The horse that wove."

"O yes," Nireus said.

"Well, well," the groom said, "everybody thought it was them who had him."

The lad from the Curlews came up to the cart and saluted.

"Begging your pardon, sir," he said, "but would you be going up to Lord Halys's again, to the Curlews?"

"Not again," Nireus said. "I hope to sail to-day."

"If you should be going, sir—for things fall out very differently in life from what one plans—perhaps you could tell someone that you saw me."

"Gladly, if I go there," Nireus said. "Do you mean your mother?"

The Taking of Helen

"No, sir," the lad said. "It was not my mother whom I meant. But a girl who lives near there. There's no place like that place, is there, sir?"

"No place in the world."

"For if it is lonely, it is free. It is free, isn't it, sir?"

"As free as the birds above it."

"I was a great fool," the lad said. "But there was a girl up there. She married the grieve, so I came away. I could not stay there after that."

"I am sorry that you had that trouble."

"I suppose you did not see the grieve's wife, sir, while you were there? She had brown hair, cut short, like a boy's, and eyebrows that met."

"I did not see her," Nireus said.

"No, of course you would not have, sir. Thank you, sir." He saluted, turned his horse, and mixed with his comrades, who were loitering there for daylight.

Nireus was free to go on.

From very far away a cock began
To tell of milking-time to slumbering man.
Now streaks in distant cloud turned pale and
brightened,
Indistinct colour came as darkness lightened;
A bird went out to sea, and at his winging
Birds twittered in the trees or started singing.
The wind had dropped, the world was like a dream.

Recent Prose

"Lovers are mad," said Nireus, "as I deem.
Why should I help my rival to my dear?
Were Paris caught and hanged, I need not fear
For her, so lovely; she would be forgiven.
I like a star might still be in her heaven,
See her, be near her, love her, die for her.
Yet if I died for her, it would not stir
Her heart for me, she likes the men who blaze
A path before them with their kindling ways,
Paris, Euphorion; never me, the fool.
O Love, you master with the bitter rule,
You make me dare all cruels for her sake.
Burning, I love the fire and the stake."

After a mile, he turned down another track on which horses had been ridden during the night; he could see no human footprints; it led through a wood, which dripped and was dark.

After another mile of soft going, the horses stopped, for they had had enough. He climbed down, unhitched them, hove the chariot into a bramble cover, and let the horses go. "You have served a queen and two kings' sons this night," he said; "may you live free in these glens for ever."

He clambered out of the wood on to a hillside in the daylight of a dull morning. He could see the sea, perhaps two miles away, straight in front of him beyond some trees. Fully four miles away

The Taking of Helen

to his right was a little town of red-roofed white houses on the very brink of the sea. Above it on the cliff, still further away, was the town stronghold, with a part of its wall fallen in the long peace.

As the town was Green Havens, he saw at once that he had come as he had planned, well to the north of Green Havens, and near to his second ship. But where were the lovers? He could see some miles of glen, hill, scrub, woodland, with beasts grazing, smoke rising, life going on, but not the runaways. Soldiers were moving like dots down the glenside near the city.

"This is hopeless," Nireus said. "I have as much chance of finding them as the desert has of grass."

He went on for another mile and then stood upon a stone wall to look about. The sun was shining upon a pasture beyond the wall. Most of the pasture was burnt, but below the wall some grass, still green, was wet with dew, and on the dew were the footprints of a man and girl who had walked side by side there.

"Here they are," he said, "here they are! These are their tracks." He flung himself down and kissed what he thought were her footprints, and as he grovelled he groaned: "She will never walk by my side as she walks by his; never, never, never. Oh, curse him, curse him for his luck; and bless her!"

There were only half-a-dozen steps in the dew, for they ceased where the grass ceased. He wiped them out with Helen's cloak and hurried on as they led. He went over three fields or enclosures into a lane, where he heard voices and stopped with a gasp, for there they were.

Beyond a curve in the lane was a roofless shrine with flowers growing on its ruins. A broken column of grey stone in front of it still bore some relic of worship there. Some bunches of flowers had been laid there "for luck" by children or passers-by, out of custom that outlasts belief. Beside the temple was a little grove of aspens, whose leaves silvered and unsilvered in the wind and made a noise like rain. Out of the hill on which they grew came water of the hill, in a gush, to an old stone trough, over which the birds skimmed at gnats.

When Nireus looked, the truants were standing together near the stone. They had laid offerings of wild strawberries upon the altar. Helen had taken an old clay jug that had been left at the spring for the purpose, and had filled it at the spring. Now she was about to offer libation there.

It was at the moment when the light first fell upon that place. Helen was standing in front of the altar with the pitcher raised above her head. Her sleeves had fallen back, showing her arms

The Taking of Helen

bare to the elbows ; the light was on her face. She was praying, but even in prayer her face seemed like a smile. Nireus had never seen her look so beautiful.

He looked at Paris. He, too, was beautiful, with the easy glow of the bright young man to whom life has not been difficult. He was standing a foot or two behind Helen, and a little to one side of her. When Nireus caught sight of him, he was watching Helen intently with a working mouth.

" My God," Nireus muttered. " What beauty and what ease and charm ! O you lucky, beautiful fiend, I would love to kill you ! "

But the water was poured, the rite was over ; Nireus ran to them.

" In the name of the gods," he cried, " why are you stopping here ? "

" We stopped to sacrifice," Helen said. " This is the Lovers' shrine."

" May the Lover bless you, then ; but you may be seen at any instant."

" Why should we not be seen ? " Paris asked.

" Why not ? " Nireus said. " Tell me, what brought you here ? "

" Love," Helen answered.

" Do not speak another word," Nireus said. " But hurry uphill with me to that copse. There we'll be hidden and can talk."

He hurried them uphill into the copse, which was mainly scrub and small oak, with firs in the high ground and ilex below. Some heifers were browsing in the scrub. At the top of the ridge, the hill tipped sharply down towards the sea, which could be both seen and heard, although a mighty thicket of berried evergreen shut the beach from view. Inside the thicket, a hundred yards from them, someone was beating mats.

"What are we to do now?" Paris asked.

"Get your breath first," Nireus said. "You surely know that you are being pursued, that you are in danger?"

"What of it?" Paris said. "We are within an hour of Green Havens, where your ship lies."

"Paris, my ship is impounded. Soldiers are guarding her and watching Green Havens. The country is thick with soldiers, hunting for you. I have another ship on the coast, among the rocks, three miles from here. She may be impounded too for all that I know, but she is your only hope."

"My only hope, Nireus? I think I have other hopes. Who is pursuing us?"

"The King," Nireus said. "If you will come aside with me to that clump of hazels, I will tell you what I know."

He took Paris aside and told him. They were in a thickish scrub on a hillside and talked in low voices, and heard not a sound; but when Nireus

The Taking of Helen

looked to one side, he saw a little boy watching them. He was a starved-looking little boy with a mean and eager face. He slunk away when he saw that he was seen. but he cast a shrewd look back and then ran.

"We had better consult with Helen," Paris said.

Danger and love had brightened Helen's eyes.

She wooed the wild things there with crumbs of bread.

A goldfinch and a squirrel with small cries

Reached little claws to her and took and fed.

"We have been seen here," Nireus said. "We must either hide or fly ; which shall it be ? "

"Where can we hide, whither can we fly ? "

"I say get under cover, somewhere near here, until dark, and then push on, over the rocks on the shore, to my ship," Nireus said.

"I will do nothing under cover," Paris said.

"I have taken the King's wife and will wear her like my crown."

"Listen," Nireus said. "There are horses coming from the direction of the shrine. They are soldiers. That is armour jingling."

"It is not armour," Paris said. "It is a farmer's harness. Nireus seems to be in a state of terror. We must act calmly, Nireus, as well as proudly. We will go quietly down to the ship."

Recent Prose

"Helen," Nireus said, "by everything you love come down to that thicket of evergreens."

His voice compelled her in spite of Paris. They hurried down the hill, followed a path through the thicket, crossed a nearly dry gully by a bridge, came to a rotting gate, pushed through it and looked about them.

"This is coming right into the trap," Paris said.

They had entered a court or yard of ruined stables and byres ; fowls were picking about it ; there was a look of ill-luck on it. They had hardly entered before some troopers rode down the hill just outside the thicket within fifty yards of them. Nireus hurried the truants forward into another, larger yard, at the back of a big low ruinous house, where a stout young woman was beating mats upon a line outside a door.

Her back was towards them, and what with her beating and her snatches of song, she did not hear them.

One, two, three, four (she sang)
Love—no—man—more.
Eight, seven, six, five.
Men promise, till they wive,
But seven, eight, nine, ten,
Little love in man then.

As she paused for breath she heard them upon

The Taking of Helen

the paving and turned. She was a frank young woman with merry eyes and the look of a jolly boy. Nireus made up his mind instantly to trust her. He held up his hand and she looked at him pretty hard. Many thought him the comeliest young man of his time ; she thought so, too, and as her song showed, she was ware of handsome young men ; but she saw that Nireus saw her and wanted her as a jolly boy, and that pleased her, for that was how she thought of herself.

" Madam," Nireus said, " there are two lovers here, my dear friends ; they are being pursued and will be killed if caught. Will you hide them ? "

Her whole nature was there at once. Paris she summed up as nothing but a handsome young man, but Helen was of a kind she had never seen ; she was Helen's slave thenceforth. Nireus saw her put out a shy finger to touch Helen's dress as she brought her to the door.

" Will the lady please to enter ? " she said.

When they were all inside the door, in a damp stone passage, she looked at them and giggled.

" I do not know where I am to put you," she said. " Will they search the houses for you ? "

" Yes," Nireus said. " And in a minute's time."

" Will the lady come this way ? " she said.

" You must not go," Paris said. " Nireus, you ought not to have brought us here."

Recent Prose

"I will go with this good girl anywhere," Helen said.

The girl caught Helen's hand and kissed it.

"We ought to be together," Paris said.

"We cannot save her: the girl may," Nireus said.

"Come," Helen said to the girl. "You will slip me into some cupboard, will you, with your dresses? I am not very big."

The girl led Helen swiftly away into the darkness of the house. Paris stamped on the floor.

"That girl would sell us all for a silver pin," he said. "I'll bring her back."

"She would die for any of us," Nireus said.

"Besides, you have to trust her now."

"Thanks to you."

"Do not let us quarrel. Listen. There is a soldier in the courtyard."

Someone was indeed in the courtyard and coming to the door with a load that bumped upon him. The two princes backed into a store-room to avoid being seen. The man came right up to the door, and gave a whistle of invitation, in the hope of calling the girl. As it failed, he sang some lines of a song.

"There was a girl called Towzel Head,
Her eyes were bright, her lips were red.
Queen Helen, naked in her bed,
Was not so fine as Towzel Head."

The Taking of Helen

As even the song failed to bring the girl, the man came right up to the door, looked in and called to her.

"Are you there, Myrtle? Are you there? Where have you got to? Are you entertaining all your fine friends?"

He listened for half a minute, then muttered to himself, "Ah, she is away!" and resigned himself to going. He seemed to fill buckets at a well, and then bore slowly away, with his load, singing, till he was out of earshot up the hill.

The girl reappeared.

"Where have you hidden the lady?" Paris asked.

"I will not say," she said. "She is hidden. I will hide you."

"Tell me where the lady is," Paris said, "in case I have to go to her."

"There are soldiers riding to the front of the house," she said. "Will you come?"

She took Paris hastily along a passage and up some steps. Nireus heard the soldiers approaching; he took off his princely coat and thrust it into an oil jar. The girl came back for him.

"I have nowhere to put you," she said, "and the men are at the door there."

"Can I hide in the well-house?"

"No, there's no room."

"Let me out here, then," he said. "Where can I find a pick and shovel?"

"There, by the cart."

"I'll get into the gully then and dig a basin for the brook."

At the other side of the house a dismounted horseman was already rattling at the door, and crying, "Is there anyone inside there?" While the girl went through the house to open the door, Nireus took pick and shovel, scrambled into the gully and began to dig. He heard the soldiers go into the house, rummage about and drag things out of corners. Presently they left the house, and came beating and peering among the tamarisks in the gully. One of them asked Nireus what he was doing.

"Making a catchment for the brook."

"It ought to be hot work."

"Pretty well. What are you doing?"

"Looking for a man and a woman."

"Weren't you doing that last evening?"

"Yes."

"Haven't you found them yet?"

"No."

"What have they done?"

"They've been doing reasons of state, and we've got to have them."

"They wouldn't come to a place like this."

"You're right. A ruin like this. The girl's a nice piece."

"She's my sister," Nireus said.

The Taking of Helen

"You'd ought to be proud of her," the trooper said.

"I am."

The sergeant in charge of the men came out at this point, wiping his mouth.

"No trace of them in the house," he said. "We'll follow down this gully to the sea and beat all the scrub. Who is the young fellow here?"

"The girl's brother, digging a catchment."

"By God, it's in the family!" the sergeant said. "She's dug a scratchment in my cheeks, I know." He walked with energy but a little unsteadily down into the gully and thrust at the scrub with his lance as he went. His men followed him and did the same: the horse-holders followed slowly along the gully top leading the horses: Nireus went on with his work. In a few minutes the soldiers were out of earshot down the gully. Nireus looked up and saw the girl looking down upon him.

"Will you help me shift my mats?" she said.

"When he had carried her mats indoors for her, she said:

"What is the worst they have done?"

"Love each other," he said. "How did the soldiers miss them?"

"They did not look in the right places. Nor in the wrong much, for that matter."

Recent Prose

"They'll come back," Nireus said, "for we were seen by a little boy before we came here."

"A little sharp thin boy?"

"Yes."

"He will tell," the girl said. "They will come back."

"If they come back with an officer," Nireus said, "they will search like the north wind. Will they find them then?"

"There is no place to hide them in this old ruin."

"Is there any other place?"

"No. Everybody is searching all over the countryside. I cannot think how you escaped to come here."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"There was a man calling you, just before the soldiers came."

"That is Steer. He tends the cows above. I do not know how he missed seeing you."

"You have been a rare friend to us. I say, the gods bless you."

The girl tossed her head.

"I've told the soldiers that you are my sister."

"You should not have done that," she said.

"My brothers are dead; all here know that."

"Whose house is this?"

"The old lady's. She is never about till evening, though: she sleeps."

The Taking of Helen

"Has she no husband?"

"Yes. The Sightless; but he is away. He is often away. Go back to the gully now; it is safer."

Some hours later, Nireus heard horse-hoofs returning to the house. It was the same squad of men, but this time they were under an officer, who had with him the boy who had seen them in the wood. They dismounted at the door. Nireus heard the officer speak to the boy.

"Since you know the house, show me the possible hiding-places in it."

The boy led the way into the house; some soldiers followed; others stayed outside by the horses. Nireus listened for what might happen.

"What are you listening at?" said a voice above him.

It was the sergeant, who had crept along the gully top out of sight of Nireus and had been watching him.

"I was listening to what was going on."

"It's no concern of yours," the sergeant said.

"You get on with your work; you and your sister and your sour thin wine. You'd sing if I had my way with you."

Nireus did not answer, but bowed to his work.

"One scratch and then another," the sergeant said, "with your little hands like woman's hands. I promise you, I'd make you work if I'd the charge of you."

"Sergeant, there!" came the voice of the officer near the house.

"Sir!"

"Come and show me where you searched."

"Yes, sir."

Nireus went on with his digging while the men trampled about in the house, moving coffers and stores and faggots, but finding nothing. In time they came out to their horses, growling at their want of luck.

"Who is that man digging there?" the officer said.

"The girl's brother, sir."

"You examined him?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's my belief," the officer said, "that this boy was put up to bring us back here as a blind. We'll search round where we met the boy."

They rode slowly away.

When they had gone, the girl came out to speak to Nireus.

"If I had not changed them," she said, "they would both have been found."

"Perhaps the worst is past now," he said.

"They've been offering rewards, they say," she said. "They will try hard for the rewards yet."

"I'd better go back to my digging," he said.

"You are not much used to digging, I think.

The Taking of Helen

You will find fat in the tallow room if your hands are sore."

She went into the house and he returned to his digging. Presently some girls came to the house and chattered with Myrtle at the door. After some minutes, another girl came hurrying up with important news.

"Girls," she said, "I've heard who the people are."

"Who? Who are they?"

"She was the wife of old Lord Halys, who lived up in the hills, a long way from here, and they had a young lord there to stay, and she and the young lord became lovers, and old Lord Halys discovered it, so they killed him."

"Murdered him?"

"Yes."

"Who says this?"

"Mother heard it from one of the soldiers who had been with old Lord Halys."

"His wife and the young lord killed him?"

"They bled him slowly to death, the soldier told mother; and she must have helped, the soldier said, and perhaps was the worse of the two."

"How did the soldier know?"

"I don't know, but of course he knew."

"When did they do the murder?"

"Yesterday afternoon, he said. They had it all

The Taking of Helen

proclaiming it. The person who catches either of them is to have two long hundreds in silver, and the person who says where they are is to have one hundred."

"Yes, and there is to be a punishment for hiding them. Anyone helping them will be whipped in the street and then blinded."

"I shouldn't think that many people would help low murderers like that," Myrtle said.

"Oh, I hope," another said, "that I shall see them caught, the confident things!"

"I wish," another said, "that they would catch them and go away. One likes to see soldiers, of course, at a distance and so on, but they are so rude, and then they stare so."

"Well, we must be going back to our work. Won't you come with us, Myrtle?"

"No, I've got too much to do, and then the old lady might wake."

"Aren't you afraid, being all alone here? Suppose the murderers were to come and murder you?"

"Not likely," Myrtle said. "If they come murdering me, they'll be shot in a soft place with a dry mop."

For a long time after the girls had gone, Nireus kept very still in his gully, since women notice everything, particularly strange young men.

Myrtle came out to him presently with some buttermilk.

"Your friends aren't murderers," she said.

"No," he answered. "My friends are the Queen and Prince Paris of Troy, and they are running away because they love each other. I am Nireus, Prince of Symé."

"Their friend?"

"You may call it that. My girl, Myrtle," he said, "I've put you into danger by bringing them here. When I came here I knew nothing of any punishment proclaimed."

"You know nothing of anything," she said. "And never will, but it is not knowing that gets things done. Wait till they're caught before you talk of danger. You would do well to sleep, prince; everybody sleeps through the nooning here. You've a look of not having slept, which might make people think."

Though he did not know it, he was so dizzy from want of sleep, that voices seemed speaking in his ears, telling him to do this or that. The heat of the summer day grew greater over his head. The aspens, that had been pattering, were quieter, the poultry ruffled into the dust in shadow, only the grasshoppers and the lizards seemed alive. The purr of the grasshoppers, the creaking of the crickets in the trees, the whisper of the aspens, and the trickle of the water at his feet, mixed into a noise of sighing, into a noise like the breathing of a sleeper. "I will lie down,"

The Taking of Helen

he said to himself. "I will lie down among the tamarisks for a few minutes. That will refresh me, and be at the same time no danger, for of course I shall not sleep." So he lay down among the tamarisks and noticed their toughness and their glitter, and covered his eyes against the glare of the sun that shone through them, and instantly was asleep fathoms deep.

In his sleep he had some feeling that Myrtle ought to have brought him food; then this changed to the certainty that something was wrong, and he leaped up, feeling for weapons. He saw at a glance that the sun had southed and was westing, and that he had slept for four hours at the least. There was alarm in the air and a noise of horsemen on the trot. Peering out from cover, he saw soldiers dismounting at the door. They were commanded by a big, rather fat, fair man with a corrupt face. "Take me into the house," this man said, "and show me exactly where you searched." Plainly this officer was much less easily satisfied than the others had been. Soon he came into the courtyard and looked among the ruins.

"Sergeant, there?"

"Sir."

"You say you searched these ruins?"

"Yes, sir, thoroughly."

"How could you have searched them thoroughly when the grass isn't beaten down?"

" I'll ride through it, sir."

" How can they be in grass, man, if it isn't beaten down ? Lieutenant, there ! "

" Sir."

" What is this man in the gully ? "

" The girl's brother, sir, digging a water-trap."

" You, man, there ! "

" Sir."

" Come up here."

Nireus climbed up the side of the gully till he was within a few feet of the officer, who looked at him hard.

" How long have you been here ? "

" All day, sir."

" What do you mean by all day ? "

" Since daybreak, sir."

" In the gully all the time ? "

" All but a minute or two, sir."

" You've seen nothing of these people we're looking for ? "

" Nothing, sir."

" Was he here when you were here, lieutenant?"

" Yes, sir. We questioned him."

" He was digging ? "

" Yes, sir."

" Boy," the officer said to Nireus, " you seem a likely lad. Why do you stay digging here, instead of seeking your fortune, a lad like you ? Don't you want a horse to ride and a sword by your side ? "

The Taking of Helen

"I've my relatives to consider, sir."

"I'm sure they would not stand in the way of your advancement. You ought not to be digging here, you ought to be in a smart troop like this, and see something of the world before the bend is in your shoulders."

"I'm their only support, sir."

"Very proper that you should think of that, of course, but you ought to think a little of yourself."

"I cannot, with them, sir."

"I must think for you, then. I will speak to your relatives."

"I am sure, sir, I am much obliged, but they will never let me go."

"They'll have to let you go. The King wants lads like you."

"I am an only son, sir."

"So am I, my lad. Where do your people live?"

"Live, sir?"

"Yes, live; lodge."

"Do you mean where they are now, sir, or where they are when they are at home?"

"Where they are now, of course."

"They are harvesters, sir: they have gone away north to the harvest. I don't know exactly where they are now, but I hope to hear, sir, soon."

"Then you are not their only support?"

"Sir, even the very old can help in the harvest."

"That is so. I don't like your answers, my lad. They smack to me of the shirk. You and I will meet again."

He turned abruptly from Nireus to look at the house.

"Girl," he said to Myrtle, "what is that upper floor above there?"

"There, sir? The pigeon-loft or dovecot."

Nireus was watching the girl's face as she spoke; he saw it harden as though it were an effort to answer, and knew at once that one of the two was in the dovecot.

"Did you search the dovecot, sergeant?"

"No, sir."

"You did not? Why not?"

"I saw no way to it, sir."

"You, boy, where is the way to it?"

"I am not employed in the house, sir."

"No, but you know the house. Show me the way to it."

"I will show you the way to it," Myrtle said.

"Indeed, he is not employed in the house. Will you come this way, sir?"

As they moved off towards the courtyard the officer turned upon his underlings.

"You have been here twice and the place is not half searched even now."

The Taking of Helen

Nireus followed the party a step or two behind them. At the doorway, as he stooped to enter, the officer saw him.

"You, boy," he said, "what do you want following us?"

"I thought I might be of use, sir."

"What use?"

"To protect my sister, sir."

"Come along, then."

They went indoors and upstairs, along a corridor, through three ruinous rooms to a fourth with a roof of larch-poles.

"I looked in here, sir," said the younger officer.

"Where is the dovecot?"

"Through that door in the wall at the end, sir."

About half-way up in the end wall was a square wooden door on leather hinges. It was locked as well as hasped-and-stapled, and behind it was the shuffling, sidling, and roo-coo-ing of pigeons.

"Fetch up the log there," Myrtle said. "Then I can stand to unlock it."

The log was a stump of uprooted tree, the men hove it up, Myrtle stood upon it, scraped some cobwebs from the door, opened it, flung the door wide and jumped down.

"You can see for yourself, sir," she said.

The officer climbed up and looked in.

"Here's a filthy place, in need of scraping,"

he said. The birds fluttered and scrambled and knocked down the cloggings of months.

“Are they not there, sir?”

The officer leaped down from the log, dusted himself with his fly-flap, and looked about the room.

“No, they’re not there,” he said. “But that doesn’t prove that they haven’t been there, or weren’t there this morning. The cote has been opened recently.”

“The man Steer was in it yesterday, catching squabs for the lady,” Myrtle said.

Nireus looked up at the ceiling of the room. It was a rude ceiling of larch-poles laid together in their bark, perhaps six feet above his head. The larch-poles were ill-laid, some had rotted and fallen and been taken for firewood, while the work had always been of the roughest. In a gap between two poles just over Nireus’ head a rag or end of gold cloth was dangling. Nireus recognised it at once as the fringe of Paris’s mantle. About four inches of it dangled down, and Nireus knew when he saw it that Paris was lying there just above his head.

The officer moved up again to the dovecot door, to examine it more closely.

“By your own confession,” he said to his underling, “you were in here this morning, hunting for political prisoners upon whose capture

The Taking of Helen

the King himself sets the utmost importance, yet you did not open this door, nor search the cote. You may have been within six feet of them."

"Sir," the young man answered, "the cote was full of doves when I was here. The prisoners could not have been there."

"You were trusted to search and did not search. It is odd that you young fools cannot be left two minutes by yourselves."

"I am afraid, sir," Myrtle said, "that you have made yourself in rather a mess in the cote among the doves. It is a mucky place at this season. When you come to the kitchen I'll fetch you a sponge."

The officer looked at his soiled gear.

"What is this room used for?" he asked.

"I believe it was a spinning-room in the old lord's time, sir," Myrtle said. "But it is not used now, except sometimes as a store."

The officer looked about it and snuffed.

"A queer smell here," he said. "It is not quite the pigeons. It smells like the smell of some scent."

He stood there sniffing the air, turning his head as a dog does, to catch the scent. Nireus knew very well that he had caught the scent of the herbs in which Paris's cloak had been laid. A keen-scented man might easily have smelled this from a few feet away.

"I expect that what you smell, sir, is the foreign

bark," Myrtle said. " A foreign ship was wrecked here three Septembers ago, and the men drowned. They were dark men, with thin faces, and they all wore red of some kind. And some foreign bark was washed ashore from the wreck, and what was found was laid here. Men said it was spice bark. It lay here a long time, in the corner there, and the room still smells of it a little. We had seven bales of it."

She went to the corner of the room from which Nireus had taken the log: the officer followed.

" This was where we stored it," she said, " but afterwards it was claimed and taken."

The officer sniffed and made a doubtful nose there.

" I suppose that that was it," he said. " Yet it seemed stronger over there."

" Yes ? " Myrtle said. " I suppose it came in a gust of wind."

The officer did not answer, but walked uneasily about the end of the room like a dog whose bone has been taken.

" After all," he said at length, " they were last seen near here."

" Well, here are the house and grounds, sir," Myrtle said.

" I'm not blaming you," he said, " any more than I am acquitting you." He turned to his underling.

The Taking of Helen

"What we ought to have had was dogs," he said. "If we had had dogs from the first, we should have caught them." He went moodily to a gap in the wall from which he could look down into the gully where Nireus had worked.

"I suppose," he said, "you didn't beat the gully?"

"Yes, sir," the sergeant said. "We went right through it till it ends on the beach."

"I'm surprised," he said.

"Sir," said his underling, "shall I call in the men to go through the house and beat everything thoroughly?"

"You will call the men in when I tell you to, and I shall tell you to when I choose."

"Certainly, sir."

"If you had done your duty at the first we might not have been powdering here in this way."

"Yes, sir."

"I say, No, sir."

"No, sir."

The commander walked to look through the gap in the wall from three different angles.

"It's odd," he said, "but I am quite sure they are somewhere here; my instinct tells me they are. But where, is the problem."

"I hope, sir," Myrtle said, "that you would not suspect me of having anything to do with them?"

Recent Prose

"I'm not so sure," he said.

"If you're not sure, sir, please search the place and clear me."

"That's what I am going to do, my girl."

But still he hesitated and seemed uncertain. He made one or two sharp turns, and then said :

"I'll have that woollen store turned out."

"Sir," said his underling, "the store was turned out from top to bottom under my eyes, and I had up a plank of the floor and probed beneath it."

"As you were, with the store, then. But they are somewhere here."

"I have an idea," he added suddenly. Nireus started and Myrtle looked hard at him ; they thought for an instant that he had seen the truth.

"Come," he said, "we'll be out of this." He walked rapidly to the door of the room, as though going out of it, and then, on the very threshold, he paused and looked up.

"What is above these poles ? " he asked.

"Just the roofing, sir," Myrtle said.

"There should be a space between the poles and the roof."

"Look there, sir, where the pole has gone. You can see that the tiles come right down." Indeed, at that place they did.

"Very good," he said, "very good for just that place ; but how do I know that it is like that all along the room ? "

The Taking of Helen

"You can test it, sir, in one or two places, where the poles are rotted."

He went to one such place and peered up into the darkness of a gap. Taking a lance from the sergeant, he groped there with the lance-head till crumbs of rotting wood, wet with a black mildew, fell into his eyes.

"Not room for much there, sir," said his underling.

"What are those rag things drooping down from the poles?" the officer asked.

The sergeant reached with the lance and brought down some of the rag things: they were clottings of cobweb with dirt.

"Come," the officer said, "we'll be out of this. They aren't here." He looked hard at Nireus as he spoke, as though searching his face for some gleam of satisfaction; but Nireus was well warned and had his face under control. The soldiers rode away; Nireus returned to his digging.

About an hour later, there was a noise of crying and cheering setting away towards Green Havens, as though the hunt were up in that direction. While he listened to the noise, he was hailed by Paris, who looked hot, dirty and white.

"What are you doing there?" Paris asked.

"Making a sort of water trap, by digging a hollow and lining it with stones."

"I am coming down to help you."

‘ Yes, but your safety ? ’

“ I am not going to hide any more. In the first place it is unworthy, and in the second it is very uncomfortable, and in the third, men cannot alter their fates beyond a point.” He flung off his gilded cloak and stooped to the task. “ Oh, it is joy,” he said, “ not to be cramped up any more.”

“ Where is Helen ? ” Nireus asked.

“ Indoors ; the girl is with her.”

“ And if the soldiers come again ? ”

“ If they come, they come. If I’m to die here, I will die.”

“ I will keep a look-out,” Nireus said.

“ Do not do anything so suspicious,” Paris said. “ Help me dig this trap and leave Helen with the girl.”

“ How did you escape the searchers ? ” Nireus asked.

“ Because fortune is with me at this time, as I knew she would be. The girl put me in a pitch-black cellar at first, behind some casks ; and I was hardly settled in before the men were searching the house for me. They came down into my cellar and were very close to me, but could not have seen me, without moving the casks. If they had had an officer with them, they would have moved the casks, but the men who had been sent there were idlers. They knocked at the casks to

The Taking of Helen

see if they were full and every time they knocked on a full one they asked, 'Is there a spigot in it?' or 'Is it tapped?' Then they rummaged about for something to steal, and kept growling about the place's poverty. Presently the sergeant came down, and asked if they had found anything to drink. They told him No. And he said, 'By the gods, boys, you're lucky. The girl gave me a drink, and by the gods it was gall.' He asked if they had moved all the casks, and they said, yes, every one, right out from the wall, and searched behind them. Then they stayed there growling for a while, talking about their officers, and then the sergeant said they had better be moving. Then they went.

"That was the first search. After that I had a sleep, but then the girl roused me, to change my hiding-place. She said she was not satisfied. She gave me some food and then put me in the dovecot, where the doves made such a noise that I could not hear what was happening. However, I fell asleep and slept for hours. What woke me was a man's voice just below me, outside the house, asking if anyone had searched the dovecot. A pretty question, Nireus, for I was locked in there; and then, another thing, I knew the man. He's one of the guard. You may not have heard of him, but they call him Lusty. If he were not obstinate as a mule, he would be as sharp as a

weasel. When I heard him I was all alive in two seconds, for I thought that I was caught.

“There was not much that I could do, shut up there, like a rat in a trap. But looking round in the dimness, after I’d gone round once or twice, I wondered if I could not squeeze through on to the larch-poles. I did not think this possible till I had to. Then I swung myself up, and found that I could just do it, so I did ; I crawled in and lay down upon the larch-poles, and a horrid bed they made. They groaned under me, and bent, and I thought they would give way. Then the worst was that they shifted, whenever I moved, and made little gaps through which my clothes kept falling, and there were little spiders in the bark ; they ran all over me, and tickled ; and then dust from the bark came into my nose and made me wish to sneeze. Then I heard you coming along to search the cote, so I made an effort to make myself comfortable before you arrived, and in my wriggles a fold of my cloak fell through a gap between the poles and caught in a stub on one of them and I could not get it clear before you were there. Why Lusty never saw it, I cannot think.”

“He very nearly did see you. He smelt you. I saw you plainly enough. What I would like to know is, why you came away the day before you had arranged.”

The Taking of Helen

"It was unworthy to stay longer."

"Did you know that you were betrayed by your man, and that you were watched? You were. The King had prepared everything to catch you."

"These people who prepare things are generally beaten."

"Paris," Nireus said, "we have been friends, but for these last months I have longed to kill you, because I love Helen. You may never get away from here; but if you do, it will be through me, so that I have the right to say this. Go to Rhodes, or to Crete, or to Egypt, or come with me to Symé; but keep from Troy, Paris, because you do not know how full Troy's cup is; nor how this will set it running over."

"You are an islander, Nireus," Paris said, "and pay too much attention to flaws and currents and gusts from the glens. Troy is a great kingdom, and a haunt of kings; my queen shall be another glory to her."

"Do you know what you are doing, Paris? You are all blind with beauty and love and think that no one sees but you."

"You are in love, you say," Paris answered. "Do you see so very clearly?"

"I am in hell," Nireus answered, "and have all hell's fire to light me. You are taking the one you love to misery."

“And you would give both hands to be in my place.”

“I would give more than that, perhaps,” Nireus said. “I used to think, Paris, that I could never care for anyone as I cared for you. When you first came to Symé and we were companions, it was the world to me, for I was an islander, as you say. I used to lie awake, thinking that no one ever had so wonderful a friend ; nor had anyone. When I look at you now, it comes back ; nothing can spoil that. But when I saw Helen, that went into its place ; and presently I hated you. I may die to-night, in trying to help you, and I shall deserve it, for I know very well, Paris, that evil will come of this. If I die, try to remember it, and love her as she deserves, if you can.”

“I do not like you as a preacher, Nireus,” Paris said. “Do you know how I feel to-night ? Like a runner coming up the Straight, with his last man beaten and all the thousands roaring for him. We are youth and beauty against the world, and the world goes down before us. O God, I am happy, Nireus !”

“You have reason to be,” Nireus answered. “I ask, will she be happy, presently ? This is to bring war to Troy, so much is planned. That will not make for happiness. The war will spread and spread, and who can see the end of a war ? Keep out of Troy, Paris.”

“ A likely thing for the King’s son to keep out of Troy, with Troy at war ! ”

“ You will be the cause of the war. You will be her husband, answerable for her happiness. Yet you will bring her into the midst of the calamity you will cause ? ”

“ You croak like a raven,” Paris said. “ You have lived for too long upon your island. In Troy, these Kings, whose war you dread, seem petty enough. Menelaus and the other and their friends, what are they ? How can they come to Troy ? ”

“ Troy has enemies enough, with ships enough.”

“ They will need all their ships. And when they come to Troy, if they ever do, they will see the Asian war and nothing more for ever. So there is for your calamity. Fight for Helen ; I expect to fight for her, I glory in the thought of fighting for her. I have challenged the old man and any of his champions : I lust for the day when I can end them.”

“ You will have to fight for her.” Nireus said ; “ so will others, who will not lust for that day. Helen will be in the city of those others, who will curse her and spit upon her as she passes by.”

“ I tell you, Nireus,” Paris said, “ that your talk is unworthy of a generous mind. Troy is glorious in her war, as in her peace and in her love.”

"A great part of love is not glorious," Nireus said, "but bitter sacrifice and pain. I know that now, and Helen will know it, but you will never know it. I think, if you make her unhappy, I shall feel it in my bones, and for all those old times in Symé, I will hunt you out and kill you."

"It is ill talking about killing," Paris said, "to a man upon his wedding day."

"It is ill talking about the future," Nireus answered, "when none of us three may see to-morrow. She and you and I are in deadly peril of our lives. It is now sunset. I will set out to my ship, to see if you can sail this night. If I am taken, let us both remember that we have been friends."

"Bring up your tools and come in," Myrtle said from above them, "for no one works here after hours. Wipe your tools clean, or put them in the house, for if Steer should see them when he comes, he might remark upon them."

They did as they were bid, just as the sun went down. Nireus set out alone to the north to see if his ship were free to sail; Myrtle went south, to Green Havens, to learn what was being done and said; the lovers were left together.

On the sea-beach, before the rocks began, Nireus met an old man, who was staring out to sea, watching the rising of a planet. "Sometimes she is not here," he said, "but when she is, I come to watch her. She comes up out of Asia,

The Taking of Helen

where all things begin, and now, as you see, she comes with her red brother, the hunter; she wants love and he wants blood, for all they are so lovely. When I was a boy they came thus, and the King took another love, and there was fighting everywhere. They float in the sky, looking down, and they make men love and kill, and then they float on, and as they float they sing, of what is in their minds, which has nothing to do with us."

"We love and kill and go on," Nireus said. "And we sing what is in our minds, which has nothing to do with them, but with the fate of man."

"Nobody knows what the fate of man is," the old man said.

"It is to try and suffer and try and perish," Nireus said.

"When I was young," the old man said, "I thought it was to love and to go with companions, pulling kings from their thrones, in these cities. But that is the youth of man, not the fate. I think the fate of man is to stand on a sea-beach and see the planets rising, and talk folly."

"Wisdom is not far from folly," Nireus said.

"Fate is very near to folly," the old man said. "And that is why the blood planet goes with the folly planet. A lover has always a dog at his heels, even Fate."

"The dogs of Fate have been hunting here to-day," Nireus said.

"Not hunting," the old man said, "but gathering to a hunt, a great hunt, which will put all beauty and pride and skill into the mud."

Those globes of light, the planets, lifted free,
And shook their glittering hair upon the sea.
The inner fires of the water glowed,
Flame rippled where the dolphin took his road,
Flame pointed where the surfaced shark was
finning,
Flame shivered in the bays from wind beginning.

* * * * *

Nireus went on over the rocks till he came to the cliffs, where there was a cave, in front of which a fire was burning. A little dark man was cooking a pot of shell-fish at the fire; he had very bright eyes which looked askant.

"Are the soldiers on the rocks here?" Nireus asked.

"No, lord," the man answered.

"Thank you."

"What do you want with the soldiers?" the man said.

"To be without them."

"Well, there are soldiers, then, within a mile of you. They are looking for you, and when they catch you, they will hang you, and you will

The Taking of Helen

deserve your death, for a man who gives up a good life for a woman is fit for burial."

"What do you know of me?" Nireus asked.

"Nothing, and want to know less," the man said. "But I gave up a good life for a woman, and I know how such look and what they come to. But now I'll have neither woman nor friend, nor be bothered with a home nor a city nor a state. I'll live like a bird and be happy like a bird, nor rot my heart out nor my hands off for anyone. But I'll come to see you hanged, for a neck that carries a head so daft as to give up all for a woman, is a neck that I'd love to see stretched."

Nireus went along the cliffs till he came to the beach where his ship lay. She was moored to the rocks at the mouth of a stream. On the cliff-tops, two hundred yards inland, in a field, a fire was burning; soldiers were passing to and fro in its light.

"The soldiers are there, lord," the ship-master said. "They say that we are not to sail."

"Have they put guards on board?"

"Yes, lord, he is on the rocks there."

"Are they looking for me?"

"No, lord, they are looking for a man and a woman. They searched in the barks for them. There's something about a soldier that reminds me of the man that fought the dust-storm; they've got more spunk than sense."

Nireus climbed to the rocks to speak to the guard, who was walking up and down on the rocks beside the ship. He was the lad from the Curlews, whom he had met during the night.

"You have not found them yet?" he asked.

"No, lord, not yet. But I am glad that you have come here, lord, because the general has been asking for you. The officers reported that they had met you in the night, and he said that he wished to see you, if you came to either of your ships. He is up by the fire there, having his supper. I will report that you are here, lord."

"Do," Nireus said. "Meanwhile I will make ready to go to him."

He had hardly washed and changed to clean raiment before the general was on board. He was the officer whom Paris had called Lusty; he was now not Lusty but weary from his day.

"Are you that Nireus?" he asked.

"I am a Nireus."

"You were in the wood early this morning, going, as you said, to Green Havens, to your ship. You have not been to your ship there. Where have you been?"

"I lost my way in the woods, wore out my horses, came to a farm and resolved to eat and rest there."

"What farm was this?"

The Taking of Helen

“ A farm up the glen, three or four miles from here.”

“ And you passed the day there, and came here now. Why have you not gone to Green Havens ? ”

“ It is seven miles away, and my horses are lame.”

“ How did you come here now ? ”

“ I walked over the rocks.”

“ Were you questioned by my pickets ? ”

“ I saw no pickets.”

“ Was this farm, where you slept, searched by troops during the day ? ”

“ Yes, I heard troops rummaging there.”

“ Did they question you ? ”

“ They said that I was not the man they wanted.”

“ Who was it, who said this ; an officer ? ”

“ A sergeant.”

At this moment an officer came towards the general, saluted, and said something in a low voice.

“ What ? what ? what ? ” the general said. He went apart to talk with the officer, then returned to Nireus.

“ For the present,” he said, “ no ship is to sail from this coast ; those are the King’s orders. You will therefore stay here till you have a licence under the King’s seal to sail.”

“ I beg your pardon, my lord soldier,” the

ship's master said, " but is this King who gives the orders, King Menelaus ? "

" Yes."

" Then, my lord soldier, this ship is not in his territory. King Menelaus' border is that stream. The rocks on this side the stream are in King Mekisteus' territory, and so are we."

" Is that the fact ? " the general asked.

" Yes, lord," his officer said.

" Very good," the general said. " As you were. In that case I will simply say to you, Nireus, that King Menelaus will resent very strongly any help given to these runaways of whom you have heard the story. Have you seen anything of them, by the way ; do you know anything ? "

" I passed my word of honour that I knew nothing of them, to your subordinate, in the wood this morning," Nireus said. " My word of honour as a prince must suffice. I have now answered many questions to you and to your soldiers ; I will now answer no more. But, none the less, you must let me offer you refreshment, such as *my ship has, for you must be weary from your search.*"

" I do not like your tone of speech," the general said. " Nor will His Majesty, to whom I shall make my report. Even islanders may find it wiser to use another tone in the King's cause."

" I use no tone but that of courtesy," Nireus

The Taking of Helen

said. "As a wanderer I offer another wanderer refreshment."

The general clambered from the ship on to the rocks, and from thence to the shore, followed by his officer. The guard from the Curlews spoke to Nireus.

"Lord," he said, "I am glad to have seen you again. We are likely to be moving off again in a few moments. There is said to be a warehouse in Green Havens, where wool is stored. We are going to search there by torchlight."

"Is that the King's storehouse?" Nireus asked.

"I do not know, lord, whose it is, but it is an old house falling to ruin, where people could hide."

"Guard, there, come on out of that," the sergeant called from the beach. "What do you mean by talking on duty? Get on up back to your horse and be ready to march."

When he had gone, Nireus scrambled up the cliff into the fields and set off running across the pasture towards the house where his friends were. When he came to a holy tree, stuck about with offerings, he paused to add a rag from his clothes, as a propitiation: then he ran again, till he saw the trees about the house. A shrill voice called something after him at this point: he stopped to listen, but did not answer; then he ran on again, till he

was among the trees. Here, as he heard loud talking and hurry, he crouched down. About a dozen men and lads were coming hurriedly down the hill. One of the men was saying :

“ Boys, we’d better run, or the soldiers will be finished before we get there.”

“ That’s true,” another said. “ There’s not much wool there.”

“ What there is, is all destroyed,” another said. “ The rats and the moth are in it.”

They hurried past, knocking at the bushes with their sticks ; some of them sang lines of songs. Nireus followed them, but soon saw that they were not going to the house ; they passed it by and went on, as though for Green Havens. When he had made sure that they were on their road, he turned back, and as he turned, he saw the figure of a boy, standing among the bushes watching him. The boy glided back into covert and then ran, as soon as he saw that he was seen. Nireus went to the house, crept round it, till he saw a glimmer at a shuttered window ; here he tapped an appointed signal till Paris opened to him. He climbed down into a little room wavering with shadows from a burning rush stuck in a bowl of sheep-fat. The room was like a tomb on which the door was shut, except that the rats were making merry in the wall. He looked at the dear face of Helen and at the proud face of Paris,

The Taking of Helen

with the thought that he was helping them to ruin.

"Is the girl back?" he asked.

"No."

"Have you been searched again?"

"No."

"How have you passed the day, Helen?"

"First in the woollen store, where the soldiers moved the wool close to me, till one of them said, 'They can't be here; no one could breathe.' After they had gone, the girl came to me and moved the wool so that I could climb out, and she had a sponge and some icy-cold water to revive me. Then she said she would call me if there were any danger. She put me in her bed (she had decked it all with flowers for me), and I slept. Then she called me up and hid me in a little recess, which she said had been made long ago for women, in the old days, when there were pirates on the coast. I was there for a long while, and heard them routing about. Since then, I have been here."

"If we go to my ship now," Nireus said, "we may fall in with soldiers or people anywhere. If we stay here, that boy has seen me again, and he may be bringing people here."

"We had better go," Paris said. "Was not that a footstep outside?"

"It was the creeper stirring," Nireus said.

"I say stay here awhile. The countryside is roused and all are going to Green Havens to search some wool-stores. It is two rough miles to my ship. Later, there will be a moon and fewer people."

"I say, wait only for half an hour here," Helen said. "Then they will be intent upon their search; now they are but going to it."

"I say, get out into the night," Paris said, "for in the night one is free and hidden; here we are shut in and hidden. And I keep thinking that I hear a footstep. I am sure that there is a footstep, of somebody with a treacherous step."

"There is a footstep coming to the courtyard door," Helen said. "There is someone tapping there."

They heard a rapping on the door, repeated several times; then a man's voice called:

"Are you there, Myrtle? Are you inside, there?"

They remained silent, looking at each other.

"That's a neighbour," Paris whispered. "From these parts, by his accent."

There came a louder banging on the door, and the man cried:

"Come on, now, let me in, Myrtle; where are you?"

"He's coming round to the other door," Nireus said. "He's an old man and walks with a stick."

The Taking of Helen

They heard the shuffling of his feet passing round the house and the pecking of the stick at each step. Soon they heard him knocking on the door at the front of the house, and growling or swearing to himself between the knocks. The house was so still that the knocking rang through it like cockcrow.

"He will wake the old lady," Helen said.

"He means to waken someone," Paris said.

Plainly the old man did mean to waken someone, for he now banged on the door with all his anger.

"Are you all dead there, are you all mad or drunk, or what is it? Wake up and let me in. Will you let me in, or am I to break down the door? You baggage and jade and she-cat, gone trolloping with your soldiers. Lords, open, will you? Open, or we'll make you open!"

"Someone is going to open to him," Helen said. "It must be the girl come back."

"It is not the girl," Nireus said. "It is the old lady, wakened."

"It is the old lady," Paris said. "Shall we put out the light?"

"Keep it burning," Helen said. "We are her guests here."

From somewhere in the heart of the house the step of age shuffled and the breath of age wheezed. An old, old creature was coming to the door,

Recent Prose

wheezing and muttering. They heard her. "O, dear me! O, my poor heart! O, dear! O, my poor back! O, the gods pity me! O, it's too long a way, a dear." They heard her pass along the passage outside the room in which they were, and then on, to the door, calling out to the knocker that she was coming. Soon she was fumbling at the bolts and trying to pull them back. Paris, looking out, saw her there, wheezing and fumbling, lit by a rushlight which she had laid upon a stone. The flame blew about and flung shadows, while the fingers tried to slip the bolt.

"There it is," she said, as the bolt fell back. "Come in now, if it's you, The Sightless."

As the door opened, the wind blew in so wildly that the light danced on the rush as though it would blow out. Somebody came in from the night and slammed the door behind him.

"Who else would come to this house?" the man said. "Not many, I should think."

"Not many, indeed," the old lady said. "My heart's very bad to-night. Go you to the kitchen."

"Your heart's well enough not to keep me waiting at the door, one would think," the man said. "I've seen the time when a princess would open the door to me and princes bring me my drink."

"The latter end of our time is for reflection," the old woman muttered, as she followed him.

The Taking of Helen

“To think it all out in the dark, when we’ve lived it all out in the light.”

The man paid no heed to what she said, but strode forward. Paris could see that he was indeed The Sightless, being a man long blind from a wound in the head. He was a big man, with the milky seamed face of the Sightless ; on his face was all the tragedy of the bitterness of a soul who had found no compensation for being blind, not even in thirty years. He strode along the corridor like one who knew it well ; all was darkness to him. As he went, he muttered some lines of a poem :—

“I came, with three black ships, from many-
tossing Leros,
Whose trees the north wind shakes, the oak-
trees good for ships.
I was the loveliest man of all my fifty seamen,
None had such arms as I, nor such a chest, nor
strength.”

As he came abreast of Paris, the sense of the blind made him turn towards him. He muttered :
“Princes are here again. Misfortune follows
princes.” He strode up to the door and stared
down upon them with eyes that could not see.

“Welcome to the poet,” Nireus said.

“It is long since a prince bade me welcome,”
The Sightless said.

"A princess bids you welcome," Helen said.

"What brings a beautiful princess to this house of misfortune?" he said. "Is it misfortune?"

"Fortune," she said. "Lovely fortune." And she looked at Paris with the eyes of a lover.

"There are three of you here and one of you has not spoken," The Sightless said. "Time was, when I was not sightless, that everyone would have greeted me."

"I greet you last," Paris said, "because I, too, am a poet, and was shaping a greeting in verse."

"Sit down among us," Helen said.

There was a noise of shuffling and wheezing at the door of the room. The old lady was there, *holding up her rushlight to look at them*. She was short of breath, but either past alarm, or too full of pains to trouble about the presence of strangers in the house. Perhaps she did not see that they were strangers; or perhaps, being extreme old, on the brink, daily, of other worlds, she was not sure if those she saw were of this world, or hallucinations.

"Madam," Helen said, "your maid let us rest here. We thank you for the shelter you have given us."

"Ah, dear me," she said, "you're welcome, you're welcome. So the maid let you rest here? A good maid, a good maid."

The Taking of Helen

"I don't know that she is so good," The Sightless said, "to leave the house, so that I stand in the dark for hours." He went growling out of the room.

"You must not mind him," the old woman said. "He is still not used to this, for he is a man, and men will chafe, where women see the will of God."

"That is very true, madam," Paris said.

"I hope, madam," Helen said, "that you are not in sorrow here, that he should chafe."

"I sometimes think that it is all sorrow," she said, and began to cry with the silly sad tears of old age.

"Ah, madam," Helen said, going to her and stroking her hand. "It cannot be all sorrow, for he is a great poet and you have helped him, as you have helped us."

"A dear," the old woman said, "I was forgetting the broth."

Myrtle came in at that instant. "I have the broth," she said, "and I have grapes and bread and an honeycomb."

"May we all eat together?" Helen asked.

"I have not eaten with princesses these many years," the old lady said.

"It is time the princesses had better luck," Nireus said.

Myrtle ran to the kitchen to fetch The Sightless, who was swallowing his soup by the fire there.

"Get you out of it," he said. "I'll eat with none but my thoughts, for there is bitterness in all things to me, save in them."

Paris had followed Myrtle to the kitchen from the fear lest the old man should wander out and tell men that there were strangers there.

"Sir," he said, "it is because of that that we would have you with us. Let us have your thoughts, lest our meal be a bitterness; a princess and two princes beg you."

"Young man," the blind man said, "once, when I was a man, before I became this thing, I was a prince myself, but now I have forgotten the ways of princes."

"Sir," Paris said, "you are our host, as well as a great poet. Will you not give three wanderers the privilege of saying that they were once your guests?"

The girl looked from Paris to the blind man, wondering that her life in the ruin should suddenly be filled with princes. The blind man rose.

"There is small privilege in being a guest here," he said. "All is ruin and desolation and the latter end."

"The latter end is the beginning of the new thing," Helen said. She had followed her lover so as to be with him, and now stood in the kitchen doorway with one hand on Paris's arm, and the other on Myrtle's shoulder.

The Taking of Helen

"For me there will be no new thing," the blind man said. "Only old darkness. But since you plan to trouble that darkness, I will come." He dropped the horn spoon on the floor and moved forward.

"The broth is burned," he said, "but since you insist, you shall eat it. Bring the broth, you, Myrtle," he added.

"I will help you, Myrtle," Helen said.

He spoke little during the meal, but when it was over, and the wine had been passed, he said :

"I have made poems of many things, but of one thing I have never made a poem, and that is of myself. Are you handsome and strong and quick-witted and good spearmen? I was all those things, far more than you. And I was a prince, being the son of the King of Leros, the most beautiful and the most fertile and the most famous of all the islands. I went travelling on the mainland, and wherever I came they took me for a god, I was so beautiful and so strong. Till I came to the castle of a King whose name I will not now remember, a great King, lord of many lands, and rich and old, and married to a young wife."

The ancient lady settled to her chair.

Long living with her man had made her face
Like his, a blind one, milky with despair,

With no joy left for sorrow to erase.

Recent Prose

“ Married to a young wife,” the blind man repeated, “ a very beautiful girl, the daughter of a King, and, some said, of a goddess. There is no beauty in the world now ; it was all burned up in her. They tell me of the beauties now, but they are dead leaves, they are ashes, they are ghosts. Beauty has been done in flesh, it cannot be repeated. Before I became this thing I saw it. And the King, gods serve us, her husband, a little mean peeping tiptoe man, a grey thing, buttoned up in gilt, with a face like a weasel. God makes such fellows kings, because God is not a man, and he tumbles such fellows down because some men are.

“ He had long red boots of soft leather, laced to the knee, Asian fashion, which he loved better than his wife. I said he had a face like a weasel. There is blood and life in a weasel’s face ; this man had a face like a fish. Down in the town there, in the fishers’ row, you will see the heads of the fish cut off, and the dogs worry them and the

The Taking of Helen

"Man has no wisdom," the blind man said. "Man is blind, and the blind are not wise, but sometimes they are impatient. Will you talk more folly, or shall I go on with my tale?"

"Go on, sir," Paris said. "I was rude to interrupt an older man than myself."

"Not rude, sir," the blind man said, "only young."

"I fear it is the same thing, sir," Paris said.

"Many think so," the blind man said, "but the many err as often as the few, and there are more of them, and they mind less."

"Will you tell us more of this King, sir?" Nireus asked.

"More of him? There was no more of him," the blind man said. "He was an outside, with soft red boots to the knee, and routine for the rest. One quality he had, if you can call it a quality." He drooped his head while he thought of the old king's quality, but contempt grew upon his face as he thought; whatever it was, he could not call it a quality; he put it fiercely from him.

"Out of the routine, he was the shell of a sucked egg," he said. "He was less, for with egg-shell you can make, whatever it is you make with egg-shell. Gods serve us, why do I speak of him?"

"I tied him in his throne with my own hands, in a game, and afterwards I took his wife.

“ Upon a dewy morning we went to hunt the stag.

We held the hounds outside ; the huntsman rode the cover ;

When my stallion heard the horn his mane shook like a flag,

My heart leaped like the stag, as I looked upon my lover.

“ The King was there ; not that he ever hunted, but it was his routine, to do whatever was done.

“ There was trodden sage there and the smell of the horses, and we were seven miles from the sea. So I and his wife rode up to him, before all his court, and there I told him that she was mine, and that if he had anything to say let him say it. Say it ? He had nothing to say. He giggled.

“ I rode along the whole of that Court ; she beside me ; and I told them that she was mine. They were his creatures ; they had bows and spears, and we defied them. They did nothing. They looked at him, then they looked at us ; then they looked away.”

There was a silence ; the blind man was lost in his thoughts ; somebody had to say something.

“ That was a triumphant moment for you,” Nireus said.

“ Was it ? ” the blind man said. “ It felt so, at the time. To be young and splendid, and to

The Taking of Helen

have your love, and to defy the world for it, and to stake your all on it ; there is a triumph in that, perhaps."

" There is indeed," Helen said.

" But no. It is not a triumph," the blind man said, " it is a defiance ; and that is a gesture."

" A fine gesture," Paris said.

" Was it ? " the blind man said. " I did the wild thing and the generous thing. I put myself upon the cast and flung, and I looked to them to do the wild and generous thing, and they did not do it. They looked and looked away. They did not care, did not care enough ; we did not matter enough.

" If they had done something or said something, it would have been easy, for we were white hot.

" I tell you, their silence was the first wound, the first touch of death in all that glory of life. We rode away, we two ; and I despised them ; and yet, that night, on board our ship, going out into the world, their silence came back, it was a judgment. It was like a frost in spring. And the next day it haunted me, and ever since. It was inertia ; it was routine ; the things that run this world. I had dared them and they were stronger than I, infinitely stronger. Inertia goes on and routine presses till one is out of the world.

" And it did ; for that was our last glimpse of

life in the world. In the routine, we had been queen and prince, riding out with the Court to hunt the stag. It was a dewy morning and the air smelt of trodden sage, and she was riding a white and I was riding a stallion, and the world ministered to our pleasure. Out of the routine, we were wanderers, with a story on our heads, a story against us. They were wise, those courtiers who looked away. What need to lift a finger? The arrow was in us and would rankle.

“For a time we were young, and then we were not young, and then I became this thing, and now I am old. While I had my sight, they were glad of me, those men in the routine, wherever I went. They used me, my courage, my wit, my skill. They praised me, they rewarded me; not too well. I was a man, which they were not; till this happened in my head.

“Now my light is out, and I have nothing but a few verses, after the old style, which nobody wants. I’ve done all and dared all and spent all, and have been nothing and am nothing, while those twenty men who looked and looked away are still powers in their state, using the men like me, as they choose. Sometimes I think I am perhaps not a man but a Force or Daimon bringing in a sort of fire from beyond life, while the world pours sand upon me. Sometimes I think . . .”

He paused; he did not say what he sometimes

The Taking of Helen

thought, but gulped at his wine and thrust the cup down upon the table in his hand like a claw.

"What do you think?" he asked. "You are young. You are of the routine. You should be able to tell me."

"Sir," Nireus said, "is it not with men as with the stars, that most are steady, some wandering, now near, now far, and some blazing and hurrying and shedding change as they go? You burn and wander as a comet, perhaps, and can have no settled place nor peace."

"Sir," Paris said, "life cannot offer all things to all men. It offers one choice only, to be yourself, or to be as another chooses. You chose to be yourself, like the wild goat on the hills; others choose to be tame goats in the fold. What do you think, my dear one?" He turned to Helen.

"Madam," Helen said to the old lady, "I should like to hear what you think, for a poet told me once that the man sees his life as a picture of all his desires, and forgives no thwartings of them; while the woman sees his life as her child, perhaps crippled, perhaps wicked, but hers still, to love or to forgive. Surely wisdom is where forgiveness is; so it is for the woman to speak."

"I," the old woman said, "I think that life is the shepherd of sheep and very hard to all who break from the pen. All that we women can do is to try to make it less hard for those, and in

trying we sometimes make it harder ; as I have done for you, my dear. But if I made it harsher for you, it has been all glorious for myself, so that I thank the gods that I have lived near the light all my days and seen it grow the brighter as the clouds came. I was a queen once, and it was nothing ; but ever since then I have been with the kingly, and it has been all the world, my dear."

" There, there," the blind man said.

" Madam," Myrtle said to Helen, " the wind is beginning to sound in the trees. If you were to set out soon you would be at your ship before it really sets in, and before the moon is up."

" Yes," Paris said, " the wind is rising. It will be fresh off shore in an hour from now."

" We will start, then," Helen said, " if you are ready."

" I am ready," Nireus said.

" I will set you on your way," Myrtle said ; " it is a long mile to the rocks and the young bulls may be loose on the pasture."

" I will come with you," The Sightless said, " because you are my guests, and the darkness is my daylight."

" And you must take some honey and wine and the apples, and the new bread if it has set," the old lady said. " These little baskets that I make will be so handy for you to carry. And some

The Taking of Helen

woollens from the wool store, Myrtle, because they do not know how cold it is at night, on the sea, when the wind sets in to blow."

"And they must have my hunting spear," The Sightless said. "For I hear that they have no weapons, and the world is a rough place to those who cannot be rough to it. It was a good spear, in my day," he said, bringing out the spear. "It may serve you, lord." He gave it to Paris, for he had the blind man's sense of the colours of the souls about him.

"You will not refuse it, lord," he said. "Age is good for nothing but this for one thing, that it can furnish the setter-forth, if the setter-forth will permit."

"Sir," Paris said, "we cannot thank you enough for all your kindnesses to us and all your gifts and help."

"One other thing I would like to beg, sir," Nireus said. "And that is, that you would sing to us one of your poems before we go."

"I will sing to you, perhaps, on your way, sir," the blind man said, "for this is not the house for singing, nor is it the time. The girl has the things, I hear. We will set out."

They made their farewells and started towards the rocks. Helen walked with Myrtle, The Sightless with Paris, and Nireus alone behind them. They went down a rocky track and turned out

of it to the right by a path through a cornfield which Myrtle said was a short cut to the sea. They saw the sea, and then stopped dead in the corn, at the sound of horses and the jingle of armour.

"Horsemen coming along the beach from Port Phenice," the blind man said. "They are soldiers marching in twos. They will turn up the track there and we shall just miss them."

They heard the horsemen leave the beach and turn up the rocky track. The horses struck and stumbled on the stones, and the men, who were now as weary as the horses, swore at them.

"Come on with you, and search the house another time."

"He that made twice made three times."

"Why can't he burn it, and be done with it?"

"He thinks we'll catch them this time."

"Catch them! he! Catch a weasel asleep!"

"Less cackle in the ranks there!"

"Sergeant, there!"

"Sir?"

"Can't you stop that cackle in front?"

"Yes, sir. D'ye hear, there? Stop that cackle in front, or by the gods I'll come in among some of you!"

The horses passed on towards the house, with the riders muttering among themselves. When all had gone, the lovers set out with their guides,

The Taking of Helen

out of the cornfield, and over the nearly dry bed of the brook, to the beach where the sea was breaking. The wind was setting out from the land and making the water alive. They could look for a fair wind. Presently they were at the rocks where the ship lay waiting for them in the creek. Her sail had been hoisted but not sheeted ; it hung slatting in its gear. The master of the ship welcomed Nireus.

"They've been here again, sir," he said, "looking for you. They've been asking us all sorts of questions," he said, "about why we were here. But they were only soldiers. There's something about a soldier," he said, "that reminds me of the western lands, where fat and folly go fine. But I suppose you will be sailing, sir ? "

"Sir," Nireus said to the blind man, "will you not sing to us before we go ? "

"I will sing after you are safely gone, young man," The Sightless said. "There are soldiers riding down from my house in this direction at this moment. That poisonous boy at the corner saw us as we passed, and has told them."

"I saw no boy."

"There is always a boy at the corner. What is done is seen, and what is seen is told, and what is told is avenged. But if it were he or not, there are the horses."

The master and Paris had helped Helen on

board. Paris shook hands with the blind man. The noise of the horse-hoofs was plain enough now on the beach, within five hundred yards, and drawing nearer.

"We had better shove off," Nireus said. "They are near."

"Plenty of time, sir," the master said. "They cannot use their horses over these rocks." He began to cast loose the stern-fasts while a man in the half darkness hove the turns of the bow-fast off the rocks.

"Sir," Nireus said to the blind man, "had not you and Myrtle better be going from here? You may be had in question about us. Persuade him to go, Myrtle, will you not?"

"I attend my guests till they are out of sight and out of hearing," the blind man said. "And I am too old to change my habit because a boy is afraid."

"I am not afraid," Nireus said. "But I am grateful for a noble kindness and would hate myself if you were troubled for it."

"A little trouble the more will not hurt me," the blind man said.

"Now, my lord," the master said to Nireus, "if you will step aboard, we will shove off."

"Good-bye, Myrtle. And bless and thank you for your kindness. And good-bye to you, sir."

"Good-bye."

The Taking of Helen

“ Good-bye.”

“ Let go forward,” the master said. “ Jump in aft.”

The starboard oars backed her off and the bow oars gave her way. She moved forward as Nireus reached her deck. Helen and Paris were standing there waving their farewells. Nireus heard Myrtle sob ; an oar-blade scraped on a rock and splashed into the water, the rowlocks grunted as the rowing began. The master ran to the steering oar and pulled three vigorous strokes and the ship slid onward and away.

“ Overhaul your gear and sheet home,” the master cried.

Nireus saw the black shapes of horsemen ride up against the sky on the little knoll beyond the rocks. He could no longer see Myrtle and The Sightless, for they stood lower down and were merged in the darkness of the boulders. Helen stood beside him, staring out to sea, her fair hair was blowing in the wind and tears were running down her face. An old sailor forward at the sheets began to sing a hauling song :

“ Give all for love, my bon-ny boys,
And ask for no re-turn-a,
For sorrow follows after joys,
And that’s the way to learn-a.

“ I had a lovely love so fair,
 I gave my all to woo-a,
She took my friend and left me bare,
 For that's the way they do-a.

“ She stripped me naked to the mire,
 And off away she ranged-a,
For men are hurt by their desire,
 But who would have it changed-a ? ”

LETTERS

NIAGARA

“**A**LL the way, I had remembered the tales of the roar of the water, and how it can be heard for miles, but what I heard was only the train, and even when I stood in Niagara, within 500 yards of the American fall, I hardly heard it ; what I heard was the rapids above the fall, which are picturesque and beautiful, in spite of the ice, yet perhaps nothing out of the way in the magnificent sense. They are a rush and a wild crying of rather clear greenish water much broken by falling and by rocks and by the big Goat Island in the middle of the falls.

I wandered down the stream and quite soon saw the edge, with the water going over the edge, and nothing beyond the edge except the Canadian shore 400 yards away. Just at the edge the water greened and went very fast ; so I hurried up right to the rail by the brink, and as I came within ten yards (going in the direction of the stream) I heard the fall's big voice, and then, when I looked over the edge, it was really terrific.

It is all heaped and built up below with mounds and skulls of gigantic ice, with icicle teeth in their

jaws. These mounds come up halfway the height of the falls, and the water goes down into a chasm among them, and ten yards down from the edge it ceases to look like water, but is like teased wool and terror and God knows what ; and out of the chasm comes a smoke of water, infinitely strange and like the ghost of water, and this rises and flies about, overhead and everywhere, and fills the air with drops, and falls on the trees and freezes three inches thick.

I crossed over to Canada, and wandered on till I could see the Horseshoe. I suppose the gorge is some 200 feet deep or more, and this vast bulk of water topples into it and comes up again in a mist much higher than the fall, and floats around everywhere, not like mist so much as escaping steam, and in among it are great noble sea-eagles, drowsing and drifting and cruising, and underneath is a vast, glacier bulk of ice, with rifts of bedevilled water, and a whirlpool going round and round, churning up ice and trees and chunks of things which might be bodies and slowly freezing, so that the ice near it has big irregular curves in it, where the rings of the whirlpool have frozen.

The fall itself is not easy to describe. It is rather clear, greenish water, and it is quite quiet, not very deep, just before the fall, and it rises and goes over the lip almost like metal, and then seems to see what it is doing, and seems to try to get

back, and ceases to be water, or anything like water, or anything on earth, but something rather white and devilish and astonished, and one could watch it all day for ever, not with awe, perhaps, but with a kind of kinship with it.

The air is so mist-soaked that everything near, roads, gorge and rails, is caked and heaped with hard white ice, and this will sometimes stay till July, they tell me, in its bigger heaps. The noise of the falls is not so terrific, nothing terrible, but is—like all big water—like trains going by. Sometimes, they say, when the ice is breaking up and going over in bergs, many tons in weight, the noise is too awful, but not now.

I drove to the rapids below the falls. The river below the falls runs in a narrow gorge only 300 feet across, and I suppose the same in height, and you go down the gorge in a cliff railway like the one at Clifton, and if the wire should snap you would go into the rapids and be dead in five seconds ; and then you come out right at the water on a wooden platform with a rail, some 200 yards along the rapids, a sort of little walk ; and whatever the falls may be in dignity and majesty, the rapids are in savagery and hellish force. I never saw such water, and how any mortal man could ever have thought to swim it and come out alive I cannot conceive. It is not water changed to something else, as at the falls, but it is water

that has become a devil. Before it goes down the fall, it is like the star of the morning, like Lucifer, sō pure and green and bright, and at the rapids it is really re-emerging after the fall, the very devil of hell. It comes along with a sort of blind sweeping romp, and then as it sweeps, a great big belly of a wave will rise up from underneath, right in its path, and the first wave will go over it just as if they were playing leap-frog, and then they both shout 'Hooray, hooray!' and go on with the romp together in the biggest game of all hell.

What makes it specially fearful is the dead wan colour and the thick slush of ice on the top, which makes it almost semi-solid, and to see a semi-solid acting like this makes you marvel. Sometimes you see a big heap of water thrust its snout out of the rush and swim back and bite some big wave coming at it and burst it all to bits, and then it jumps aloft and laughs and smashes itself on a rock with a kind of devilish glee, as one who says, 'Well, I killed my enemy, anyway, first.'

I could have watched the place for hours and days and months. Captain Webb tried to swim it. I cannot think why he was allowed to try. A wave just picked him up and squeezed him against another wave and killed him dead, as he must have seen would happen. No human being could

Letters

live in such water. It has force enough to light the world and grind the world's bread beside.

* * * * *

“ In every room in every hotel in this country there is a modernized Bible which I generally read a little of. Just now I am reading the story of David, which is a fine tale, and full of colour, but, my God ! what a savage desert tribe and way of life and (as the lady said of Mrs. Campbell as Cleopatra), ‘ How unlike the quiet home life of our own beloved sovereign.’ They say that in California there are still many giant sequoias (the big red-wood trees) which were growing in the time of David, and were fine trees at the time of Christ, and were really worth looking at at the time of Shakespeare, and are world famous to-day, and are still not at their best. I lay awake last night thinking of it with a kind of awe, of that enormous blind calm power and will to live.

The 7th was a day of adventure, for I was asked to a big camp to speak at a mess. So I went and spoke at the camp, which is one of the biggest aviation camps in the world. Last July it was a vast flat plain, covered with scrub, which they call mezquite and chaparral. (Mezquite looks like leafless apple trees which have been buried, so as to hide the trunk. Chaparral is a sort of ever-greenish, ever-brownish thorny shrub like

berberis, only short.) Now it is an immense and splendid city, humming with life and machines, with great roads and theatres and irrigations, and a vast populace of mechanics. And there I met an airman, who would take no denial, but that I should come up with him, as it was a good day for flying.

So I put on a leather coat and leather cap and goggles and I saw my machine on the ground (a very trim and rakish little thing, one of the fastest 'ships' in the world), and I said what Cæsar said to the boatman, under my breath. Then I climbed into my seat and was strapped in, and was told not to monkey with the machinery, which was quite the last thing I ever thought of doing. Then they turned her round, head to wind, and my driver got in, and after some preliminaries they touched her off.

For the first hundred yards or so, it was just like being in a motor car, but as we ran along the ground the thing became alive, like a very eager, wonderful trembling horse that was on her mettle and was going at a big leap, and I felt all her excitement, and wanted to pat her on her neck and give her a lump of sugar, and her cylinders became louder and louder, and her rush more wonderful, and then suddenly we were off the ground and slowly rising, and no longer conscious of motion, except that there was a roaring gale

in one's face, and a great roar from the propeller. Then, looking down, I saw the ground like a vast chess-board, and people like dots, and then we began to tilt in great circles as we climbed, and that was a deep emotion, but still I was far less conscious of flying than I have been at sea in a sailing ship when working aloft. Then presently, a lot of smoke began to drift slantingly down upon us, and I thought, 'Is this smoke from the engine?' It was a thin smell-less, faint white smoke, and soon I realized that it was not smoke at all, but cloud. Soon we were in the cloud, out of sight of light or land, except in rifts and gleams, and then presently we were in a new world.

We got above the cloud, which was a high-flying fine-weather 'cumulo-stratus,' and looked down upon it. And, from above, it looked as though a land of vast sand-dunes, such as Trebetherick, had been covered with deep snow, and now lay white and dim and wonderful, like a land in a dream, with the sun shining on it; and then in rifts and patches there was the world, infinitely far below us, and looking just like aeroplane photographs of it. But what was most wonderful was to see another aeroplane far, far below, like a kestrel, just over the cloud, and her shadow under her on the cloud. You may remember that Hauptmann lyric about the hawk :—

Far under me my shadow—
My shadow drifts with me.

My man stopped the engines, and we floated there in utter silence but for the wind, and in a stillness and steadiness so strange that we could not tell that we were moving ; so then we talked for half a minute, and then he touched her off again, and we went for a cruise.

Coming down was so gradual that it did not rouse much emotion, and the actual landing, which I had expected to be a bump, was not really more than a car would make in crossing a rut in a road ; but when one got out, one felt a little odd. Anyhow, the queerness only lasted about thirty seconds, and the main impression left was one of great interest and beauty and unreality, not exactly of pleasant interest, nor of human beauty, but it was a new thing, and I was glad to have done it—though I felt that it belonged to this generation, and not to mine.

* * * * *

“ To go on with my diary from the time of my fly in the aeroplane :—

I spoke at the mess, and went round the camp and saw aeroplanes being made and repainted and smeared with ointment, and generally groomed and trimmed. They are most lovely things, very like big model ships, and all full of exquisite

Letters

joinery and splicery and neat piano-wire. I could have spent hours over them. But time forbade, so I up and away and got on board my sleeper and to bed, and before dawn we were bound away to the West. At dawn I peeped out and saw the great plain of Texas, covered with mezquite and chaparral, getting a little colour on it; and then presently we were near the Rio Grande, which is as big as the Thames near Cholsey, only a blue-green cream colour, and runs in a savage bed of rock and sand, and is fringed by savage mezquite and savage reeds. All day we ran along Texas, and the country didn't vary much. It was a vast plain, with hills in the distance, and very hot, a blinding sun and a good deal of dust, but an expanse so great that it gave one the sense of a freedom.

It was very waterless away from the river, and one saw dead cattle and horses here and there, killed probably by the drought, and over their corpses the great buzzards or vulture hawks were cruising. We climbed slowly all the day, and in the night it fell cold, for we were 4,000 ft. up, and at dawn I peeped out and saw the sun coming up over some crags which shut in as it were an incredibly vast flat floor of plain, an immense flat arena, round which, 100 miles away, was the ring of crags, of a bright blue colour, in the intense air.

Recent Prose

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PLAY-WRITING

LAST week, I was talking about story-writing, which, within the limits of a reader's endurance, may be as diffuse and various as life itself. A good novelist, as a good novelist once wrote, ought to be like a looking glass sauntering down the street.

To-day, I have to speak about play-writing, which is a concentrated focussed art. A play is a magnifying glass turned upon some selected part of life, upon the heart or brain or essence of life.

Some think that life is spread about the body in the heart, brain, blood and marrow. Others think that it dwells in one cell, the king-cell or in some small group of master-cells to which all the other cells of the body are the slaves.

The novelist can saunter about and look all over the body of life. The dramatist is forced by the nature of his art to examine the life itself, the master-cell. The novelist may fill his book with irrelevant and unimportant things ; he is read in idleness, by the idle, who skip when they are bored. The playwright is acted in public. His imagined characters compete with life. If they are not more living than life, people will prefer their own talk or their own deeds, and will not look upon the stage.

All great nations have loved the play. Three peoples have produced master-playwrights who have stood the test of time. The Athenians, three; England, one; France, one.

The foundation of drama is this, that human action is hypnotic; if you do something, you will hold the attention of men.

If you stand in a street and look fixedly, up, down or ahead, people will stand to look in the same direction. Hardly any purpose is too slight to arrest those who have none.

A good playwright once wrote that the only things needed for a play are a plank, two actors and a passion. If any man be in earnest about something, others will watch him.

When you have two men earnestly intent on opposite sides of some issue vital to themselves you have a contest or play, interesting, exciting or absorbing to watch. A play is a contest between opposed wills, or a contest between a human will and the Fate which surrounds him. When the contest is not presented simply, the play ceases to hold the attention of men. Knowledge, rhetoric, fine writing, and other matters, *when misplaced*, may mar the simplicity of a play.

The maker of a play considers first, how to make his fable simple.

In this, he is helped by those guides to all simple construction, the Unities, of Time, of

Place, and of Action. If he can reduce his scene and action to one, and the time in which the action happens to one day, so that he is dealing with the doing of one thing in one place in one day, he has reduced his fable to the terms of the stage and made his task the easier. If he can reduce his acts from five to three, or from three to one, and his cast from thirty to six, he will probably improve his work. However many people he may need on the stage, his play will in the main be carried on by three or four persons.

Having simplified his fable, by reducing it to its essentials, the writer begins his play by a scene of Exposition, to show the audience his situation and his characters, and to interest them in them. Then he has to make his conflict grow to its most passionate height, by a succession of little touches, and to end when an end has been reached, that is an end. The audience must go home satisfied, that the conflict is over, that Macbeth is killed and Phedre dead, and Lear broken, and Cæsar avenged, and Perdita found. The action must be pushed to its uttermost. That which does not go beyond all limits is limited. That which shrinks from an end because it may be terrible, or glorious, or not what they do in Kensington, is not of the theatre, but a compromise with it.

Of course the un-terrible and the inglorious, and what they do in Kensington may be the

subject of good and interesting and amusing plays, but the mind of man prefers the excessive contest. Man would go to a prize-fight any day rather than to a compromise play. They would go to the shadow of a prize-fight, rather, on the cinema screen. It is because the cinemas do not shrink from the end, that they have been more popular lately than the speaking theatre.

Having opened his play, the aim of the writer must be to keep his situation slowly growing in intensity, so that his audience never ceases to be on tenterhooks. He has to think of what would be proper to his imagined character to say in the imagined situation, and of the effect of this upon the audience, and of its effect on the stage on the imagined situation, and its effect on the play as a whole. But he has to think mainly of the play as a whole, so that the audience may always be expecting, always excited, always kept in suspense, and delayed, and a little baffled, and continually surprised. In *Julius Cæsar* you expect Cæsar to be killed, and yet you are kept in suspense, by all those warnings, by all the hesitations of the conspirators, and lastly by a long speech from Cæsar when the conspirators are all round him ready to kill him.

The art of the stage can only be learned on the stage. Something of the methods of the masters may be learned from reading. The masters are the

Athenians, the Englishman and the Frenchman, of whom I spoke.

The Greek or classical play was made for continuous action, but in order to rest the actors and to delight the audience, the action was interrupted by the Chorus, of men or women, who danced and sang or repeated lyrical poetry of great beauty. Sometimes the people of the Chorus are used in the action of the play. They are questioned by the persons of the play; sometimes with very great effect, they are taken into the plot, and watch the victim go to his doom, without stirring to save him, or escape from his doom, without betraying him.

The Greek play is very highly condensed. As a rule it is a focussed brooding upon a part of a known fable. It is a focussed brooding on that part of a fable which in our much looser type of play would be only the last act. That is one of the results of having a fable known to everyone. When you make up your fable, as the modern dramatist generally does, you have to waste time, the play has not been simplified for you, you have to simplify it for yourself. That needs a power of mind and of will which few men have, and the temptation is to begin too early in the story.

As Sir Philip Sidney wrote, when a bad dramatist writes a play about St. George he begins with the birth of the dragon.

The fable of the Greek play is always taken from the great tales of Greece. The audience knew them, but they wanted to see those tales made real to them, and they wanted to know how the dramatist would treat the tale, what point would interest him, and what special beauty of pity and understanding he could bring out of it. There was not any need for time to be wasted with exposition ; the playwright could plunge at the heart of the action, take the very life of the contest, cut to the core and laid bare, and brood upon that. The Greek play none the less begins solemnly and slowly, generally with one long speech of exposition, lasting two minutes or more. Everybody knew what the speech was about, but it was a solemn speech, setting the hearts of the hearers to deep purpose and preparing them for the high and shaking moods of tragedy. How solemn the speech could be you will see by looking at a few of the plays of Euripides. In the *Alkestis* this opening speech is made by the god Apollo ; in the *Medea* it is made by the nurse of Medea's children, in the *Hippolytus*, by the goddess Aphrodite ; in the terrible opening of the *Hecuba* it is made by the ghost of Polydorus, that has been wandering bodiless for three days. In the *Ion*, the speech is made by the god messenger Hermes.

The divine things were thus mingled with

mortal things, and a reverence was added to the interest, some such reverence as our English audiences felt in the great days of the old church plays of the passion and agony of Christ. Everybody knew the story and had brooded on it a little, now by the help of the arts they were to brood upon it profoundly. The heroical tales were so blent with the doings of the gods that faith and fable went together. In our own heroical tales something very like this is suggested. Robin Hood was a sworn servant of the Virgin Mary, vowed through reverence of her to the service of all women throughout the world. In the Arthur story many inventions of Christian mysticism have been grafted onto the legend.

All these expositors' speeches take you to the heart of the matter in hand. In the *Alkestis*, Apollo tells you that Death is even now appearing to take Alcestis from her home. In the *Hippolytus*, Aphrodite tells you that the last day has dawned for Hippolytus. In the *Hecuba*, the wandering ghost tells you that the last bitterness of suffering is about to fall on Hecuba. In the *Ion*, the messenger of the gods tells you how Ion, the god's son, shall find his mother that very day.

Then immediately the puppets are dallying and you can interpret between them. Death enters to take his prey: Hippolytus goes to the hunting, and Hecuba comes to tell of her dream, how

the ghost of Achilles had cried for the blood of her daughter. The play has begun and will go on to its end. Part of the horror and terror of the tragical play is that it must go on, that it is like Fate or Destiny. You know that Alcestis and Hippolytus go to death, and Hecuba to misery, and you are held tense to see how the net will be put over them and the bitterness exacted. You are watching the working of Fate, and the ways of the gods with men.

Perhaps it would be better to follow one play throughout. Let us take the *Hecuba*. Hecuba once Queen of Troy, now a slave taken by the Greeks, tells that in her dream she has heard Achilles crying for the blood of her daughter Polyxena.

Instantly the chorus (in this case captive Trojan women) break out with a long song of lamentation and tidings, saying how the Greeks have disputed, but have decided at Odysseus' pleading, that Polyxena must be sacrificed, and that Hecuba must therefore prepare for her daughter to be killed. The mother calls her daughter, the girl comes forth. Her mother tells her that she is to be killed, and immediately Odysseus enters to take her to be killed. Within ten minutes of the play's opening you reach a terrible moment. All the ten minutes have been filled with a horror of tense preparation. Now Odysseus enters, like Fate, and there comes a moment of suspense, one

wonders how Hecuba will deal with Fate, whether she will be able to arrest the doom. She tries. She reminds him how once, when he, Odysseus, came into Troy as a spy, and Helen recognized him and told her, that then she, Hecuba, saved him. She reminds him that then, in his peril, he grovelled to her and babbled to her, and that she saved him. Odysseus replies that he is willing to save her, as she saved him, but that Polyxena must be sacrificed, the Greek hero must be honoured in death, or Greek heroes might not in another war be so ready to die. Hecuba cannot change Odysseus. She bids her daughter to plead ; now that she has failed.

What follows is the most painful scene in all drama. The girl says that she is not going to plead. That she has no chance of happiness, and had better die.

Hecuba begs to be killed instead of her daughter, then with her. Odysseus refuses these pleas, and warns Hecuba not to insist, lest force be used. Then the mother and child make their farewell, and Polyxena goes forth to be sacrificed. Just before she goes, one pitiful touch of horror is added. She says that Polydorus, Hecuba's son, still lives and will tend his mother. The audience knows that Polydorus is dead, but the hope of his being alive is still held out to Hecuba, in the last words her daughter speaks to her. Polyxena goes

forth. Hecuba swoons. The play has lasted perhaps twenty minutes, and the first cup of bitterness has been emptied.

Now the play so far has been upon deep and elemental things in the life of men and women, love of children, the horror of ruin, the beauty and the glory and the helplessness of the young girl. Even badly acted, and it is difficult to act a thing so elemental badly, the thing must be profoundly painful on any stage.

Now the audience must have relief, the actors must have rest, there must be some change, and a new beginning, before a new cup of bitterness can be filled.

The chorus breaks in with a song that is partly of lamentation for slavery, partly beautiful brooding about the places to which Fate may carry them, whether to the lovely gleaming brooks in the meadows of Phthia or to the islands, or to Athens, but in any case far from ruined Troy, in exile.

After this chorus, comes the new beginning, the new character, the messenger who has to tell the tale. He comes in upon the calmed mood of the audience with pity and tenderness for Hecuba, to lead her to bury her dead child. He tells the story of the sacrifice and leaves the mother to prepare for the burial of Polyxena, with such rites as the ruined slaves can still compass. While she

Play-Writing

prepares thus, bearers bring in a body upon a bier. She thinks that it is the body of Polyxena, but it is the body of her son Polydorus, who has been cast up by the sea, after having been treacherously murdered by his friend, the Thracian King, Polymestor.

Then Agamemnon enters, to bid Hecuba to come to her daughter's burial. Agamemnon has taken Hecuba's daughter, Kassandra, to himself, as a prize of war. Hecuba thinks that she may at least stir him to avenge her son. She becomes a suppliant to him for this. Agamemnon says that he is sorry for her, but that his army loves the Thracian King, and that though he would be glad to help her, he cannot face displeasing the army.

Hecuba says that she will avenge her son herself. She sends for the Thracian King, and prepares to bury her two children.

Here is another break, a long chorus, this time of lamenting and of story telling, of the sack of Troy and a curse upon Helen and Paris who wrought all this evil. The second cup of bitterness has been emptied, the play has lasted perhaps forty minutes, and the attention of the audience has been turned upon the Thracian King, Polymestor, and wonder has been roused. Will Hecuba succeed, helpless as she is, in winning her vengeance. Will the gods, who are ruled by Law, do her justice.

The next part of the play begins with the entrance of Polymestor with his two little sons. Hecuba says that she has a secret to tell him. But the audience knows that Hecuba means to kill him, and it is necessary for the playwright to prove to the audience that Polymestor is deserving of death. She questions him about her son, and Polymestor lies to her. She tempts him with gold and the greed of gold possesses him. She persuades him and his children to enter the tent of the captives. There with the help of the women she blinds him and kills his children.

The blinded man comes out raving to Agamemnon, tells how he was blinded, and how his babes were killed, and begs for vengeance. Agamemnon spurns him; he breaks into wild prophetic raving, telling of the coming deaths of Hecuba and Agamemnon, and is cast out. The play ends with the setting out of the Greeks for home, taking with them the Trojan women into captivity. This part of the play is about twenty minutes long. The whole bloody and awful tale has been compressed into an hour's action.

The construction of the Greek play was throughout close and formal. There was no attempt at realism. The actors wore buskins to make them taller and masks to take from them all the vanity of personality. Some say that they used contrivances to heighten the sound of their

voices. It may be that the old classic dramas of Japan are more like the Greek classic drama than any performances now in existence. There the actors speak in high strange tones. Choruses of musicians sit on each side of the stage.

I have mentioned some of the uses of the chorus in a Greek play, let me now say something about two other uses of the Greek theatre, the Messenger and the God out of the Machine.

The Messenger is one who enters at a vital point in the play, generally rather late in the play, with a long and stirring story of something which the audience passionately wants to hear. He seldom takes any part in the action. Usually, he has next to nothing to say, except his story. *Those who object to story telling on the stage can never have heard a "Messenger speech."* You can have anything on the stage, if you can make it effective ; " *All is, if you have grace to use it so.*" The Messenger is always effective. A compact and passionate story well told, is a stirring thing, and will hold any audience. In some plays, like the *Alcestis*, there is no Messenger. In others, it fills five minutes of the action. Always the story is an exciting and interesting story. Often the poet gives to it a marvellous beauty and extravagance of ornament. In the *Electra* (of Sophocles) the tale is a description of a chariot race. In the *Medea* it is the slow uncoiling account

Recent Prose

of the poisoning of Medea's rival. In the *Ion* it is a strangely beautiful account of the making beautiful and setting forth of a feast, and of a poisoning at the feast. In the *Suppliants*, it is an account of a battle.

But even the Messenger speeches, to be effective on the stage, must be artfully constructed so as to be effective. They must be prepared for and led up to. There must be some great event happening off the stage, for news of which the audience must be on tenterhooks. The Greek dramatist so built his play that the audience even to-day, wants to know what happened to Jason's bride, and whether Hippolytus suffered from the curse or not, and whether Iphigenia escaped. Then the Messenger comes in with the news. Often, even then, his tale is delayed, so that the audience may be kept in suspense. Often he exchanges a few lines with the Chorus. The Chorus may say :

But see, who comes ? What man and of what race
Art thou ? declare. What city calls thee child ?
Art thou a stranger, or a Greek ? Pronounce.

THE MESSENGER

A stranger, I, yet reverencing the gods.

CHORUS

What purpose brings thee to this temple door ?

Play-Writing

MESSENGER

Ay me, a purpose dark. Dire news I bring.

CHORUS

Dire news ? What news ? An earthquake or a fire?

MESSENGER

Earthquake and fire not unmixed with plague.

CHORUS

A riddling speech. Dark answer from dark tidings.

MESSENGER

Lo, here, the King ; to him I bring the news.
Hear, King, strange tidings.

Even then, he will not begin his tale, but will delay it with preparation and beauty and strangeness, keeping on a low note, so that when he really launches forth, everyone is tense, and he carries the audience with him, leads them to a height, the climax of his tale, and then gradually leads them down from the height. And why ?

So that the audience may be calmed, so that the next climax, which will be made by the King, may begin to be prepared for.

Many Greek plays are ended by what is called the God from the Machine; a God or Goddess was let down or displayed upon or above the stage at a critical moment, perhaps with thunder and lightning ; and always with abrupt interference in the conduct of the play as settled by

the passions of man. Our own early religious plays contained devices of the kind. God spoke from the cloud or out of heaven. To a simple audience, even to a jaded audience, to any audience in the right mood for the theatre, these devices must have been, and are, effective, deeply effective. Modern taste perhaps shrinks from them. Audiences to-day are philosophic rather than religious, and very well informed as to the nature of machines. If religious plays were permitted among us, such devices would be familiar to us. As such plays are now forbidden by the law of this land, it is only open to us to accuse those who had them of bad taste.

The English play sprang like the Greek play from certain simple occasions of rejoicing, and developed on very different lines. After the Reformation the English play was divorced utterly from religion; it had nothing to do with Chortating the ways of God. It developed out of the sports of the country fair, the ballad But see, whetters, tumblers, and mystery Art thou? decl. of the passionate culture of the Art thou a strang

ture of the two that it is so
A stranger, I, yet re^{so} common or so rare has

Used, and few things are
What purpose brings rare much misunderstood.

We abuse the Elizabethan play, the Shakespearean play because we see it performed upon the modern stage, which is shut away from the audience, uses scenery, and has an action broken by several intervals. Shakespeare wrote for the Elizabethan stage, which jutted out into the midst of the audience, into what would now be the stalls ; had almost no scenery, and had an almost continuous action, with perhaps only one break in the middle of the play.

The Shakespeare tragedy, at first glance, is very unlike the Greek tragedy. It is two or three times as long. It is not formal. It follows no stiff convention. It breaks the unities of time and of place. It is not opened by a god nor ended by a goddess. If it stirs one to the soul it does so by the intensity of its human feeling.

In the great Greek play, the poet broods upon the terrible event, or the consequences of a terrible event known by the audience to have happened.

In the great Shakespeare play, in *Macbeth*, in *Julius Cæsar* and in *Lear*, the poet broods upon the terrible event and its consequences.

In both, the subject is justice, the foundation of all wisdom. In the Shakespeare play, the terrible event is nearly always a treachery, a blindness, an obsession, a thinking over much of one thing. Something unnatural, some violation of the bonds which link us to each other, some act

of injustice or want of wisdom. In *Julius Cæsar*, the treachery is that of Brutus to his friend. In *Macbeth*, it is that of Macbeth to his King and guest, in *Lear* it is an unnatural yielding up of power, of father turning against daughter, and sons and daughters against their father. In *Hamlet*, the strangest of all the great plays, the unnatural thing, the violation of the bond, comes not from injustice, but from wisdom. Hamlet will not avenge his murdered father, because he he is too wise. Killing his drunken uncle will not mend matters. It will be only a murder the more and he is not a murderer. Why do it? He does not do it. But in all those great plays, the power behind life that directs life, wants that justice done, and the treachery avenged, and by devious ways unfailingly gets it done, and in *Hamlet* the wave of that want rises, and at last bursts, and sweeps away not only the guilty uncle, but Hamlet who had let him live.

All that is a vision of the heart of life. It is the seeing, that behind life, watching us, there are two forces: one a force of justice, that does at long last do justice, with the weapons that the wicked man has forged. The other a force which works through the whole of life by the big thing and by the very little thing to bring to be the thing that has to be, the end unexpected, the end that cannot be avoided; the end which takes the

strong man Lear, and the passionate man Othello, and the glorious man Anthony and the generous man Timon, and lays them in the dust, in spite of their strength and their glory and their struggle and their contempt, as it will lay us, in a way that we cannot foresee.

When Shakespeare in some of his greater plays showed the treachery, the terrible event, with all its consequences, he was brooding on the heart of life, watching it as a god might watch it, with perfect understanding, perfect pity and perfect power. He takes no sides. Wisdom is nothing but pure justice, a holding of an even balance. He sees how the thing began and how it ended. He paints it for us as naturally as though it were happening under his eyes and with a power of lyrical passion such as no other poet ever had to burn it into our hearts for ever unforgettably.

He wrote his best plays for a continuous action with a break in the middle shortly after the doing of the terrible deed. The stage tradition of those days was for speed. When once the players had begun, the action rushed, the tide gathered and gathered, till it burst in the great crime, till Duncan was killed, and men were knocking at the door, till Cæsar was dead and promised to funeral, and Lear was mad in the storm.

Then there is, not a pause, for there must be no pause in drama, but a change and a calm while

the second wave can assemble and gather. The tide has arisen and overwhelmed the innocent, the ebb has to succeed and carry the guilty out to sea. You have slack water, the turning of the tide, the ebb follows. Marc Antony turns the Romans against the killers of Cæsar, and they die up and down the world, like hunted animals. Macbeth sups full of horror and dies in horror. Lear is saved too late, and dies by the dead body of Cordelia.

And now that I have said these things about plays in general, and how they have been made and are made, we will apply the principles, and make a play here and now. Everybody can begin a play. You begin a play with exposition. A friend of mine had a play sent to him which began with :

*Curtain rises and discovers housemaid scrubbing
the floor.*

HOUSEMAID

O heaven, the misery of a double life.

The Greeks began their plays with a solo. We generally begin with two friends of the chief characters talking to each other. So we will begin a romantic play in the English manner. So curtain up. Enter Roberto as for a wedding. To him Tomaso. But if I call them Roberto and Tomaso I shall get them mixed, so I will call them First

Play-Writing

Friend and Second Friend. So curtain up. Enter First Friend and Second Friend. The play had better be in blank verse as it is so much easier to write than prose, and easier to speak than rhyme.

TOMASO

Roberto ! Hail. But why this wedding dress ?

ROBERTO

What, knowst thou not, the Duke shall wed
Olivia ?

And I'm best man.

TOMASO

Fore George, it cannot be.

ROBERTO

Fore George it is, and twenty minutes hence.

'Tis certain sure. I had it from the Duke.

All waits, the banns are called, the ring is bought,

The cake is ordered and the Bishop booked.

This very morn the Duke shall wed his love.

Why should he not ?

TOMASO

Please Providence he may, and yet I fear.

ROBERTO

Fear. Tush. Fear who ?

Recent Prose

TOMASO

I fear the Count Ruffiano.
Nay mark me friend for I have cause to fear.
Count Ruffiano swore to wed Olivia.
Olivia's father promised him he should.
The Count has staked his very life upon it,
He will not lightly let his love be lost.
Not even the Duke dare make him such a foe
As Ruffiano were if crossed in love.
I tell you, friend, this marriage cannot be.

ROBERTO

Believe or not, 'tis all the same to me.
Here comes the Duke, himself will tell the news.

(Enter DUKE.)

DUKE

Hail good Tomaso and Roberto both.

1ST & 2ND

Hail gentle Duke. Good morrow, Duke, good
morrow.

TOMASO

Duke, is it true, to-day's thy wedding day?

DUKE

'Tis true. This day in yon cathedral's aisle
I wed my love.

ROBERTO

You see? I told you so.

Play-Writing

DUKE

I wed the ever-beautiful Olivia.
You look aghast ? Is something wrong with you ?

TOMASO

Nay, good my lord, but I am something scared,
That you should thus enrage Count Ruffiano.
He will not lightly lose Olivia's love.
His vengeance on you may be terrible.

DUKE

Tush, good Tomaso, what's the Count to me ?
A miserable man who drives a Ford,
A paltry soul who does his own repairs,
He is a worm. A fig for Ruffiano.
Nay, come, my friends, upon my wedding day
'Tis fitting that we toast the fair Olivia
In golden cups of sparkling Burgundy.

O, she is fairer than Queen Helen's self,
Fair as the rosy dawn that on the snows
Casteth a blush among the Apennines.
We'll to the inn to toast Olivia
In generous cups of crimson Burgundy
And kingly cocktails that have strawberries in
them.

ROBERTO

Long live the Duke. Come, to the tavern, friends.
Olivia. We'll toast the fair Olivia.

Recent Prose

TOMASO

But I must to the church to take a seat,
So drink for me. We'll meet in church anon.

(Exeunt severally.)

That is exposition. Now for a development.

(RUFFIANO rises from behind a bush.)

RUFFIANO

So, squalid Duke, for all thy strawberry leaves
Thy Ducal coronet shall never twine
Olivia's brows. For know, that Ruffiano
Has sworn to wed her, and thy power, slight man,
Is nothing, wretched ape, to Ruffiano's.
Ho, good my varlets, Ruffiano calls.

(Enter MURDERANO and ASSASSINITO.)

Good villains, wilt thou steep thy hands in blood ?

MURDERANO

Ay, Lord, for gold.

ASSASS.

Ay, Lord, and silver, too.

RUFFIANO

Seest yonder inn ? Go thither, varlets, swift.
There where the Duke and good Roberto drink.
Steal up to them and in their several cups,
Drop unobserved these tabloids, these white pills.
It is a sleepy drug that in a breath

Play-Writing

Makes the red brain fall drowsy, and doth dull
The nimblest soul. When thou hast drugged the
pair,

Swift drag them to the cellar and there strip
Their senseless bodies of their marriage robes
And the Duke's brow of all its strawberry leaves
And bring them to me here. About it. Go.

MURDERANO

We go, your honour. Now thou Duke, beware.

*(Exit MURDERANO. Manent
ASSASSINITO and RUFFIANO.)*

ASSASS.

But, good, my Count, what is thy jovial plan?
What wilt thou do when thou hast drugged the
Duke

And taken from him all his wedding clothes?

RUFFIANO

Dost thou not see, my brave Assassinito?
The Duke and his best man will both be drugged.
We'll take their clothes and we'll disguise our-
selves

In their apparel. Then in the cathedral
I, not the Duke, shall wed the fair Olivia.
And thou shalt be best man, Assassinito.

ASSASS.

But she will see that you are not the Duke.

Recent Prose

RUFFIANO

Friend, love is blind, and the cathedral's dark.

ASSASS.

But Count, the Bishop knows the Duke full well.

RUFFIANO

Tush man, the Bishop has too much good taste
To raise a scandal at a ducal wedding.
He'll say the Duke doth not look quite himself.
We'll hold our handkerchiefs across our faces
And he will think we fear the cinema.

ASSASS.

'Fore George, good Count, thou hast a matchless
brain

But soft, here comes the fair Olivia. *(Exit.)*

RUFFIANO

Good morrow to the fair Olivia,
Hail fair Olivia, may thy marriage day
Be happy to thy lover and to thee.

OLIVIA

Thanks Ruffiano, but I bid thee speak.
Hast seen the Duke, my bridegroom, hereabout?
He is so late, I fear the prelate's rage.
What can have kept him from the church, Ruffi-
ano?

Play-Writing

RUFFIANO

Why, fair Olivia, he forgot the ring
And had to run to fetch it, so he said.
Nay see here comes my good friend Murderano,
Who brought the Duke but now a wedding gift.

*(Enter MURDERANO carrying Duke's
clothes and coronet.)*

Say friend, the Duke is coming, is he not ?
This lady waits for him. *(Aside)* Say, yes, thou
dog.

MURDERANO

(Aside) I've done the deed and here are all their
clothes.

Yes, good my lord, the Duke is on his way
Decked for his wedding, and the merry boys
Do strew his path with roses and with lilies,
Saying, " Hurray for this our noble Duke."
He bade me say that he would soon be here
To claim his bride at the cathedral porch.

RUFFIANO

'Tis well, good friend. Now fair Olivia, see,
Thy bridegroom comes, so hie thee to the church.
This gentle Murderano shall escort thee.

MURDERANO

Take thou my overcoat, good Ruffiano. *(Gives
Duke's clothes to RUFFIANO.)*
Now lady fair, thy arm, we'll to the church.

Recent Prose

OLIVIA

Thanks Murderano. Thanks good Ruffiano.

(OLIVIA goes with MURDERANO.)

RUFFIANO

Now off my coat, and off my waistcoat too,
This collar, now. 'Fore George, a fair white tie.
May condemnation wait upon this stud.
So, the Duke's waistcoat, with embroidered roses.
His noble frock, and now his coronet.
His gloves. 'Tis well. Now am I perfect Duke.
And thou the best best-man that ever was.

(Re-enter 1ST FRIEND.)

But see, Tomaso comes. Up handkerchiefs.

TOMASO

O noble Duke, make haste unto the church.
The organ hath struck up, the bells are ringing,
Thy Ducal band is playing Mendelssohn
And Gounod gushes from the gramophone.
And twenty cinemas and Olivia wait thee.
Why dost thou dally, Duke; nay answer me.

(Enter MURDERANO.)

MURDERANO

O noble Duke, make haste unto the church.
Olivia waits thee at cathedral porch.

Play-Writing

RUFFIANO

I come sweet bride. Wait, Murderano, here
In case our friends should follow from the tavern.

*(A great clash of bells as
RUFFIANO goes off.)*

MURDERANO

(Remains) Ring out wild bells, ring, happy marriage bells,
Thou playest a dirge to all the Ducal hopes.
Dost hear thy marriage bells, Duke, in the cellar?
Aha. Aha.

*(Enter DUKE in shirt sleeves,
with ROBERTO.)*

What, villains, dost thou dare approach
the wedding
Drunk and in rags? Hast thou no shame, base
varlets?

DUKE

But I'm the Duke.

MURDERANO

Away, base scullion knave,
Thou shalt not interrupt the noble wedding.

DUKE

Dog, let me pass.

ROBERTO

It is the Duke. Seest not it is the Duke?

Recent Prosē

MURDERANO

Duke me no Dukes nor seest me not no seests.
Thou canst not come cathedralwards in rags.
Stand back.

DUKE

Make way.

ROBERTO

Hands off.

MURDERANO

Thou gabber-tit.
Nay, George, I'll flesh thee.

DUKE

Were't thou fifty, varlet,
As thou art only one, I'd cope with thee.

ROBERTO

Draw, dog.

MURDERANO

Defend thyself.

DUKE

Stand clear, Roberto,
Nay stand aside, thou spoilest my attack.

MURDERANO

Come on the two, I'll pasture vultures with you.

DUKE

Have at thee, then.

Play-Writing

ROBERTO

'Fore George, your Grace, well thrust.
(*Alarums. They fight.*)

MURDERANO

Slight fool, dost think to cope with Murderano ?
Why, in the Street of Death in Port of Spain,
I fought the pirate captain, Montezume,
And split him to the midriff with one chop.
Then on the Grand Canal I met Rialto
With all his bloody gang of Ghibellines
And gave their flesh to wolves, their blood to
kites.

DUKE

Keep thou thy breath for fighting ; you will need
it.

ROBERTO

Well said, my lord, well parried, oh, well parried.

MURDERANO

That got thee.

DUKE

No.

MURDERANO

Then that did.

DUKE

Dog, thou liest.

Recent Prose

MURDERANO

That got thee, then.

ROBERTO

Foul, foul.

DUKE

O basely thrust.

MURDERANO

Call to the fowl, for you will need the vultures.

DUKE

Look to yourself, O dog, for I'll avenge
That most foul blow with which thou stuckest
me.

MURDERANO

Poor coroneted boy that idly thinkst
Thy paltry rules apply in time of war.
Know, crimson death doth tend upon my sword
Seeking the scarlet channels of thy blood,
As there. As there. (*He wounds the DUKE.*)

ROBERTO

Art hurt, my Lord ?

DUKE

A scratch

ROBERTO

Time, then, one moment, while I bind it up.

Play-Writing

MURDERANO

Take any time you can, for I intend
To give thee both eternity anon.

(ROBERTO *ties up the DUKE's wound ; while he does so, enter ASSASSINITO. MURDERANO and ASSASSINITO set upon the DUKE and ROBERTO from behind, disarm, gag and pinion them.*)

ASSASS.

See there, my paltry worldlings, lie you there.
I am Assassinito, do you know,
And this, my gallant comrade, Murderano.
We are the minions of Count Ruffiano,
Count Ruffiano, do you apprehend ?
Thy deadly foe, who bids us tweak thy beard
And kick thee in thy prone though ducal ribs
As now we do. (*They exult over their victims.*)

MURDERANO

And he has news to tell thee,
News of a wedding in society
Which thou shalt watch upon the cinema
Before our daggers end thee, never fear.

ASSASS.

There is a wedding toward, noble Duke.
Thy wedding, didst thou say ? I think not so.
It was to be thy wedding, but is changed.
Count Ruffiano is the happy man.

Recent Prose

Dost hear those bells? Dost wonder at their chiming?

They ring the coming of the fair Olivia
To the cathedral porch. Ha, now she enters,
Walks up the aisle, while all society
Ashine with bright silk hats and glittering eyes
Stares at her frock. Ha. She is at the altar,
Where stands a manly bridegroom to receive her.
Who is the bridegroom, sayst thou? Who indeed?

He wears thy Ducal robes and coronet,
But is he thee? I trow he is not, Duke.
Nay, hidden by thy trappings, noble Duke,
And masked behind the bashful handkerchief
It's Ruffiano. He shall have Olivia.
Ha, see, from out the dim cathedral gloom
The worthy Bishop comes, that good old man.
His lips do move on "Wilt thou have this man?"

DUKE

O mercy, spare her, spare her, let me go.
Take anything I have, but spare Olivia.
Spare her, I say.

(Enter a POLICEMAN.)

O help me, officer.

POLICEMAN

Here, what's all this?

Play-Writing

MURDERANO *and* ASSASS.

We are the Duke's attendants.
These ragged rascals have been making trouble
At the cathedral.

DUKE

O it is not so.

ROBERTO

They are two scoundrels hired by the Count
To murder us. This is the Duke, and I . . .
I am Roberto.

MURDERANO *and* ASSASS.

That is what they shouted
In the cathedral, irreligious drunkards,
It took us all our strength to bind them thus.

DUKE

O officer, believe us. It is true,
I am the Duke.

ROBERTO

He is the Duke, good sergeant.

POLICEMAN

Go sleep it off. I've heard that tale before.

DUKE

But, man, I am the Duke, the very Duke,

Recent Prose

POLICEMAN

Why, very well, but take it quietly.
You must not make this tumult at the wedding.

DUKE

But, officer, believe me, save Olivia.

POLICEMAN

There, there.

DUKE

O heaven.

MURDERANO *and* ASSASS.

Art not ashamed, base varlet,
To lie thus to the gentle officer.

POLICEMAN

Well, keep them quiet till the wedding's over.
I'll send the station doctor down anon.
I've seen such Dukes as you on Monday mornings
Become plain Misters.

DUKE

I am Duke. O heaven,
I shall go mad.

POLICEMAN

Nay, an you brabble thus
You must to station

(He lays hand upon the DUKE to arrest him.)

Play-Writing

But at this instant, when further delay would cause the remediless marriage of Olivia to Ruffiano, it is Time for the God of the Machine, the greatest of all the gods, Time.

(*Enter* TIME.)

TIME

Man, let him pass. He is the real Duke.
Thou, Ruffiano, enter not that church.
Olivia, pause, the real Duke is here.
Take thy real Duke and live in happiness.
Thou, Murderano and Assassinito,
Give up thy wicked courses, find thou out
Two virtuous spinsters to be wives to thee.
Thou Duke, and thou Roberto and Tomaso,
Sign thou the pledge, thou, sergeant, witness it.
Those who are good, continue good, or better.
Those who are wicked, leave thy evil ways.
So shall you all have peace and happy days.

CURTAIN.

Some claim that the art of play-writing is the greatest of all the arts, because it uses all of them, as helps to itself. It uses music, painting, sculpture, architecture, the dance, the story, the song, all arts of decoration and crafts of machinery. It is quite true that it uses them all. Any splendour of life uses the arts. But the playwright does not

depend on those things, can get effects from them all, can move people by the use of them all. But he must not trust to them, any more than the story maker can trust to the printing press and the paper mill. All that the artist can trust to is the power of his will, and his eye to see, and his heart to feel into the mystery of life. He can trust the measure of his control of himself, and nothing else in this wide world.

To the playwright there can be but one thought, that presently his thoughts will walk upon the stage, like living women and men, in a conflict vital to themselves, and that he must deck them out to the world for that great hour with more than all that he has.

We want to be lifted out of ourselves, and the playwright wants to make his thoughts much other than himself; finer than himself, kings and princes, and dukes and duchesses, all the stately ones, all the strong ones, all the beautiful. And since, in this age, he may have no faith, but a philosophy rather than a religion and even that a doubting one, and since in this land, even if he have a faith he may not glorify it with his strength, he has to make his subject as he can, out of the life he knows best, or most longs for, or out of the shadows cast by the past.

And if in looking out upon the art of the theatre, as it exists to-day, you do not like it, and think

Play-Writing

it less fine than the Greek and less moving than the Shakespeare theatres, you can remedy it if you have the will. Some have tried and failed, some ways have been opened and have led nowhere, some have gone into what light there was carrying a darkness. But when many ways have been tried and have failed, there can be few left to fail at, and all things are easier now.

You want no great equipment, no learning, but a love of the art, no great knowledge of life, only the eye to see, and the heart to feel, and the will to keep at it. The clay of your material will often break in your hands, and you will be tempted from it by all sorts of temptations, not only the world's temptations, but mental ones. The temptation to luxuriant beauty, to colour, to description, to wit, to commonness, to fastidiousness, the temptation to reckon the art the great thing, and not the thing seen.

And at last, if you keep on, you will come to the heart of the matter, how you are yourself the agony or the contest, the two halves of you trying to make or do a justice ; not a police-court justice, not a sentimental justice, not a giving to him that hath not, as in the Robin Hood poems, not simply the turning of the wheel, as in Chaucer, not even the sorting of black from white, but the equal justice of God, in the apprehending of which men become almost as god and speak with divine

beauty and divine mercy, seeing past, present and future. And when you come to that point you will know that the whole matter is a wrestle here for just that wisdom, and that while you wrestle you weave round yourself a net from which there is no escaping, you lay a trap into which you fall, and work a justice upon yourself. And to submit to that justice is a kind of conquest, a kind of triumph, and men will stand at your body, at your grave, and say this was a man, who in this perishing world saw a beauty that cannot perish, and in the mean soul and the great soul in passion, saw the purpose of God working a justice that endures, beyond our world of little perishing things.

Some have said that one needs a great knowledge of the world to be a playwright, and that Shakespeare must have had such a knowledge. But all the mixing in the world will not make a Shakespeare. Shakespeare knew no more of the world than you or I. All men and women see much of the world in daily life. But when Shakespeare's knowledge was touched by some story, he was quickened by it, the elements and the sympathies in his mind ranged themselves in the contest like human beings, and as the great rush of sympathy glowed to a white heat in him, they cried aloud from intense life. If our sympathies could be so touched our own knowledge of the

Play-Writing

world would be transfigured, even as his. If then, to that depth of feeling, were added his power of lovely language, we should become not as Shakespeare, but glorious according to our power.

Some have said, that to-day (even if we had those powers) we should have no faith to which to dedicate them. But the great masters have had no faith. Faith is only a belief in the great masters. The great masters have only hope and charity, charity and mercy to all, and that understanding which is the forgiveness of sin, and the hope, that beyond this world beauty is a reality and justice eternal.

FOX-HUNTING

I HAVE been asked to write why I wrote my poem of *Reynard the Fox*.

As a man grows older, life becomes more interesting, but less easy to know, for late in life even the strongest yields to the habit of his compartment. When he cannot range through all society, from the Court to the gutter, a man must go where all society meets, as at the pilgrimage, the festival, or the game. Here in England the game is both a festival and an occasion of pilgrimage. A man wanting to set down a picture of the society of England will find his models at the games.

What are the English games? The man's game is Association football; the woman's game, perhaps hockey or lacrosse. Golf I regard more as a symptom of a happy marriage than a game. Cricket, which was once widely popular, among both sexes, has lost its hold, except among the young. The worst of all these games is that few can play them at a time.

But in the English country, during the autumn, winter and early spring of each year, the main sport is fox-hunting, which is not like cricket or football, a game for a few and a spectacle for many, but something in which all who come may take

a part, whether rich or poor, mounted or on foot. It is a sport loved and followed by both sexes, all ages and all classes. At a fox-hunt, and nowhere else in England, except perhaps at a funeral, can you see the whole of the land's society brought together, focussed for the observer, as the Canterbury pilgrims were for Chaucer.

This fact made the subject attractive. The fox-hunt gave an opportunity for a picture or pictures of the members of an English community.

Then to all Englishmen who have lived in a hunting country, hunting is in the blood, and the mind is full of it. It is the most beautiful and the most stirring sight to be seen in England. In the ports, as at Falmouth, there are ships, under sail, under way, coming or going, beautiful unspeakably. In the country, especially on the great fields on the lower slopes of the downland, the teams of the ploughmen may be seen bowing forward on a skyline, and this sight can never fail to move one by its majesty of beauty. But in neither of these sights of beauty is there the bright colour and swift excitement of the hunt, nor the thrill of the horn, and the cry of the hounds ringing into the elements of the soul. Something in the hunt wakens memories hidden in the marrow, racial memories, when one hunted for the tribe, animal memories, perhaps, of when one hunted with the pack, or was hunted.

Fox-Hunting

Hunting has always been popular here in England. In ancient times it was necessary. Wolves, wild boar, foxes and deer had to be kept down. To hunt was then the social duty of the mounted man, when he was not engaged in war. It was also the opportunity of all other members of the community to have a good time in the open, with a feast or a new fur at the end, to crown the pleasure.

Since arms of precision were made, hunting on horseback with hounds has perhaps been unnecessary everywhere, but it is not easy to end a pleasure rooted in the instincts of men. Hunting has continued, and probably will continue, in this country and in Ireland. It is rapidly becoming a national sport in the United States.

Some have written that hunting is the sport of the wealthy man. Some wealthy men hunt, no doubt, but they are not the backbone of the sport so much as those who love and use horses. Parts of this country, of Ireland and of the United States are more than ordinarily good pasture, fitted for the breeding of horses, beyond most other places in the world. Hardly anywhere else is the climate so equable, soil so right for the feet of colts, and the grass so good. Where these conditions exist men will breed horses and use them. Men who breed good horses will ride, jump and

test them, and will invent means of riding, jumping, and testing them, the steeplechase, the circus, the contests at fairs and shows, the point-to-point meeting, and they will preserve, if possible, any otherwise dying sport which offers such means.

I have mentioned several reasons why fox-hunting should be popular: (a) that it is a social business, at which the whole community may and does attend in vast numbers in a pleasant mood of good-will, good humour and equality and during which all may go anywhere into ground otherwise shut to them, (b) that it is done in the winter at a season when other social gatherings are difficult, and in country districts where no buildings, except the churches, could contain the numbers assembled; (c) that it is most beautiful to watch, so beautiful that perhaps very few of the acts of men can be so lovely to watch nor so exhilarating. The only thing to be compared with it in this country is the sword dance, the old heroical dancing of the young men, still practised, in all its splendour of wild beauty, in some country places; (d) that we are a horse-loving people who have loved horses as we have loved the sea, and have made, in the course of generations, a breed of horse, second to none in the world, for beauty and speed.

But besides all these reasons there is another,

Fox-Hunting

that brings many out hunting. This is the delight in hunting, in the working of hounds, by themselves or with the huntsman, to find and kill their fox. Though many men and women hunt in order to ride, many still ride in order to hunt.

Perhaps this delight in hunting was more general in the mid-eighteenth century, when hounds were much slower than at present. Then, the hunt was indeed a test of hounds and huntsman. The fox was not run down, but hunted down. The great run, then, was that in which hounds and huntsman kept to their fox. The great run now is perhaps that in which some few riders keep with the hounds.

The ideal run of 1750 might have been described thus :—

“ Being in the current of Writing, I cannot but acquaint your Lorp, of ye great Hunt there was, this Tuesday last there was a Week. Sure so great a Day has not been seen here since the day your Lorp’s Father broke his Collar Bone at ye Park Wall.

“ As Milton says :—

‘ Well have we speeded, and o’er Hill and Dale
Forest and Field and Flood . . .

As far as Indus east, Euphrates west.’

“ We had but dismle Weather of it, and so cold, as made Sir Harry observe, that it was an ill

Wind blew no-one any good. We met at ye Tailings. I had out my brown Horse. There was present Sir Anthony Smoaker, Mr. Jarvis of Copse Stile, William Travis, John Hawbuck, your Lorp's friend Dick Fancowe, and two of ye Red Coats from ye Barracks. Ye fair Sex was dismayed, it was said, by ye rudeness of ye Elements ; they did not venture it.

“ On coming to draw Tailings Wood, Glider spoke to it, and Tom viewed him away for the valley, being the old Dog Fox, with the white Mask, that beat us at Fubb's Field, the day yr. Lorp road Bluebell.

Now spoke the chearful Horn ; and tuneful
Hounds

Echoed, and Red Coats gallopped ; stirring
Scean,

Rude Health and Manly Wit together strive.

“ We went with the extream of Violence from Tailings Wood to ye small Coppice at Nap Hill where a Fellow put him from his Point, wh. gave Occasion to Sir Anthony to correct him. Ye little magpie Hound made it out in ye bog at ye back of ye Coppice, when again Hounds went at head through Long Stone Pastures as far as Tainton. Here we was delayed in ye Dear Park, the effluvia of ye Dear being extream strong and doubtless puzzling to the Noses of ye Hounds. And here I

Fox-Hunting

cannot but remark the skill with wh. ye Hounds worked it out till they had hit it off, a Sight, as Mr. Jarvis remarked to me, worthy of the Admiration of an antient Philosopher, and of the eloquence of a most elegant Wit, or Poet. Leaving ye Dear Park, He made for Norton Cross, wh. he left on his left Hand, as though deciding for ye Hill. Crossing ye Hill, in spite of ye Sheep, we was a little staggered by his being run by one of ye Shepherd's Doggs, a part of Creation that should not be tolerated, except in ye Vision of ye Poet, as in a Pastoral, or so. Here Joe Phillips, our Huntsman, made unavailing Casts, but by lifting to the Vineyard recovered him, when Hounds run him to Cow's Crookham, on your Lorp's Aston Estate.

“ By this Time your Lorp will understand our Distress. Dick' Fancowe was in ye Brook at Norton, Mr. Jarvis' grey horse had cast a shoe, and one of ye Red Coats had broak his Liver in falling at a Fence. For a time we went about to recover him :—

Now with attentive Nose the restless Hound
Endeavours on the Scent, now here, now there,
Scorning adulterat Scents of lesser Prey.
Now gloomy Care invades the Huntsman's Face ;
And Sportsmen (jovial erst) on weary Steeds
Sit pensive.

“ Here might well be seen the Advantages of a judicious Breeding in Hounds, that neglects not the intellectual Part, but aims rather at a complete Animal than alone at Sinews and Corporeal Structure. That Blood of the Old Berkshire Glorious wh. your Lorp’s Father was wont to observe, was what he most stood by, next to our Constitution and the Protestant Succession, here stood us in good stead, for it was to Glorious ye Ninth, as well as to Growler and Glider (all of ye same royal Strain) that we was indebted to ye happy Conclusion. They pushed him out of ye Stubbings at Cow’s Crookham, where, it seems, he had taken Refuge in the Hollow of a decayed Tree. We chac’t him thence upon ye Grass to Shepherd’s Hey. Here he began to run short, being not a little apprehensive, lest his Foes should triumph, and snatch from him that Life, wh. he had so long nefariously pampered.

On courtly Cock with all his household Train
Of Hens obsequious, by the Hen Wife
mourned.

“ The Sun, coming out from among ye Clouds, where he had been too long hid, made (as was elegantly pretended by Sir Anthony) a Brightness, animating indeed to us, who carried the Sword of Justice, but, to the Criminal of our Pursuit, infinitely distressing. Then had your

Fox-Hunting

Lorp seen the gay Ardor of the Pack, as they came to the View, wh. they did about Stonepits, your Lorp would have said with the late elegant Poet :—

Now o'er the glittering Grass the sinewy Hound
Shakes from his Feet the Dew and makes ye
Woods resound.

“ To be brief, we killed in the Back Yard of ye Rummer and Glass, after two and three quarter Hours of a Hunt such as (all are agreed) is not lightly to be paralleled. There was present at ye Death, beside Joe Phillips and Tom, Sir A. Smoaker, Mr. Wm. Travis and myself, all so extream distresst, Men and Beasts, that it was observed, it was a Marvel ye Horses were not dead. Such an Hunt, it was agreed, should be celebrated by an annual Dinner, at which the Toast of ye Chase might be rendered more than ordinary. Ye Hunt was upwards of fifteen Miles in Length, and hath been the Subject of a Song, by a Member of Ye Hunt, wh. as it would take long to transcribe, I forbear, hoping that we may sing it to your Lorp, before (as ye Poet says)

Ye Vixen hath laid up her Cubs
In snuggest Cave secure, when balmy Spring
Wakens ye Meadows.

“ But to pass now from Celestial Pleasures to

Worldly Cares, I have to acquaint your Lorp that your Lorp's Sister's Son, Mr. Parracombe, hath been killed by a Fall from His Horse, after Dinner with some Gentlemen, his particular Friends, an Affliction indeed great, humanly regarded, were it not also considered, how much happier his Lot must be, than in this Vale of Tears, etc. Ye young Hounds thrive apace, and 'tis thought the forward Season will be very favourable for their future Prey. I am your Lorp's most obdt., Charles Cothill."

Perhaps the ideal run of the present time would be described as follows :—

"A large field attended the Templecombe on Tuesday last at the popular meet at Heydigates. Will Mynors, late of the Parratts, carried the horn, in place of Tom Carling, now with Mr. Fletchers. A little time was spent in running through the shrubberies in the garden at Heydigates, and then the word was given for the Cantlows. Will had no sooner put hounds into this famous cover than the dog pack proclaimed the joyous news. The fox, a traveller, was at once viewed away for the Three Oaks, across the rather heavy going of the pasture land. Coming to the Knock Brook, he swam it near Parson's Pleasure, going at a pace that let the knowing ones know that they were in for something out of the common. Keeping Snib's Farm on his right, he ran dead straight

Fox-Hunting

for Gallows Wood, where some woodmen with their teams disturbed him. Swinging to his left, he went up the hill, through Bloody Lane, as though towards Dinsmore, but was again deflected by woodmen. Turning down the hill, he ran for the valley, passing Enderton school-house, the scholars of which were much cheered by the near prospect of the hunt. It was now evident that he was going for the Downs. Some of the less daring began to express the hope that he might be headed.

“Scent from the first was burning and the pace a cracker. After leaving Enderton he made straight for the Danesway, past Snub’s Titch and the Curlews, the green meadows of the pasture being sprinkled for miles with the relics of the field. He crossed the Roman Road at Orm’s Oak and at once entered the Danesway, going at a pace which all thought could not last.

“At the summit of the Danesway, known as the Gallows Point, hounds were brought to their noses, owing to the crossing of the line by sheep. A man working near by was able to give the line, and Will, lifting beyond the Lynchets, at once hit him off, and the hounds resumed their rush. From this point, they went almost exactly straight from the head of the Danesway to the fir copse by Arthur’s Table. All this part of the run, being across a rolling grass land, was at top speed,

such as no horse could live with. At Arthur's Table he was put from his earth by shooters who were netting the warren. As he could not get through them nor across the highway, then busy with traffic, he doubled down across the Starvings, where Will, the only man up at this point although now three hundred yards behind hounds, caught sight of him on the opposite slope, romping away from hounds as though he would never grow old. On coming to the level, past Spinney's End, some of those who had been left at the Lynchets were able to rejoin, but were soon again cast out by the extreme violence of the going, which continued back across the Downs on a line obliquely parallel with his former track though a mile further to the south. It was supposed that he was going for the main earth in Bloody Acre Copse. Some workers in the strip at the edge of the Copse headed him at this point. He swung left-handed past Stavesacre, and so down to the valley by the shelving ground near Monk's Charwell. Here, for some unaccountable reason, the scent, which had been breast-high, became catchy, and hounds lost their fox in the osier cars at Charwell Springs.

"Late in the afternoon, while jogging home, a second fox was chopped in Mr. Parsloe's cover at Prince's Charwell. Hounds then went home.

Fox-Hunting

“ The run from the Cantlows was not remarkable for any quality of hunting, but extremely so for pace and length. The distance run, from Cantlows Wood to the Osiers, cannot have been less than thirteen miles, most of it indeed on the best going in the world, but at a racing pace, with nothing that can be called a check, the whole way. Some wished that the hounds might have been rewarded, and others that Will Mynors might have crowned his opening gallop with a kill, but the general feeling was one of satisfaction that so game a fox escaped.”

My own interest in fox-hunting began at a very early age. I was born in a good hunting country, partly woodland, partly pasture. My home, during my first seven years, was within half a mile of the Kennels. I saw hounds on most days of my life. Hounds and hunting filled my imagination. I saw many meets, each as romantic as a circus. The huntsman and whipper-in seemed, then, to be the greatest men in the world, and those mild slaves, the hounds, the loveliest animals.

Often as a little child, I saw and heard hounds hunting in and near a covert within sight of my old home. Once, when I was, perhaps, five years old, the fox was hunted into our garden, and those glorious beings in scarlet, as well as the hounds, were all about my lairs, like visitants

from Paradise. The fox, on this occasion, went through a wood-shed, and escaped.

Later in my childhood, though I lived less near to the Kennels, I was still within about a mile of them, and saw hounds frequently, at all seasons. In that hunting country, hunting was one of the interests of life; everybody knew about it, loved, followed, watched and discussed it. I went to many meets, and followed many hunts on foot. Each of these occasions is now distinct in my mind, with the colour and intensity of beauty. I saw many foxes starting off upon their runs, with the hounds close behind them. It was then that I learned to admire the ease and beauty of the speed of the fresh fox. That leisurely hurry, which romps away from the hardest-trained and swiftest fox-hounds without visible effort, as though the hounds were weighted with lead, is the most lovely motion I have seen in an animal.

No fox was the original of my Reynard, but as I was much in the woods as a boy, I saw foxes fairly often, considering that they are night-moving animals. Their grace, beauty, cleverness and secrecy always thrilled me. Then that kind of grin which the mask wears made me credit them with an almost human humour. I thought the fox a merry devil, though a bloody one. Then he is one against many, who keeps his end up,

Fox-Hunting

and lives, often snugly, in spite of the world. The pirate and the night rider are nothing to the fox, for romance and danger. This way of life of his makes it difficult to observe him in a free state at close quarters.

Once in the early spring, in the very early morning, I saw a vixen playing with her cubs in the open space below a beech tree. Once I came upon a big dog-fox in a wheelwright's yard, and watched him from within a few paces for some minutes. Twice I have watched half-grown cubs stalking rabbits. Twice, out hunting, the fox has broken covert within three yards of me. These are the only free foxes which I have seen at really close quarters. Foxes are night-moving animals. To know them well, one should have cat's eyes and foxes' habits. By the imagination alone can men know foxes.

When I was about half-way through my poem, I found a dead dog-fox in a field near Cumnor Hurst. He was a fine full-grown fox in perfect condition ; he must have picked up poison, for he had not been hunted, nor shot. On the pads of this dead fox, I noticed, for the first time, the length and strength of a fox's claws.

Some have asked, whether the Ghost Heath Run is founded on any recorded run of any real Hunt. It is not. It is an imaginary run, in a country made up of many different pieces of

country, some of them real, some of them imaginary.

These real and imaginary fields, woods and brooks are taken, as they exist, from Berkshire, where the fox lives, from Herefordshire where he was found, from Trapalanda, Gloucestershire, Buckinghamshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Berkshire, where he ran, from Trapalanda where he nearly died, and from a wild and beautiful corner in Berkshire where he rests from his run.

Some have asked, when the poem was written. It was written between January 1st and May 20th, 1919.

Some have asked, whether hunting will soon be abolished. I cannot tell, but think it unlikely. People do not willingly resign their pleasures: men who breed horses will want to gallop them across country; hunting is a pleasure, as well as an opportunity to gallop; it is also an instinct in man. Some have thought, that if "small-holdings," that is "produce-gardens," intensively cultivated, of about an acre apiece, become common, so that the country became more rigidly enclosed than at present, hunting would be made almost impossible. The small-holding is generally the property of the small-farmer (like the French cultivateur), who fences permanently with wire and cannot take down the wire during

Fox-Hunting

the hunting season, as most English farmers do at present. Small-holdings will probably increase in number near towns, but farmers seem agreed, that they can never become the national system of farming. The big farm, that can treat the great tract with machines, seems likely to be the farm of the future.

Even if the small-holdings system were to prevail, it would hardly prevail over the sporting instincts of the race. Beauty and delight are stronger than the will to work. I am pretty sure that a pack of hounds, coming feathery by, at the heels of a whip's horse, while the field takes station and the huntsman, drawing his horn, prepares to hunt, would shake the resolve of most small-holders, digging in their lots with thrift, industry and self-control. And then, if the huntsman were to blow his horn, and the hounds to feather on it and give tongue, and find, and go away at head, I am pretty sure that most of the small-holders of this race would follow them. It is in this race to hunt.

I will conclude, with a portrait of old Baldy Hill, the earth-stopper, who in the darkness of the early morning gads about on a pony, to "stop" or "put-to" all earths, in which a hard-pressed fox might hide. In the poem, he enters when the hunt is about to start, but he is an important figure in a hunting community, and

deserves a portrait. He may come here, at the beginning, for Baldy Hill is at the beginning of all fox-hunts. He dates from the beginning of Man. I have seen many a Baldy Hill in my life ; he never fails to give me the feeling, that he is Primitive Man survived. Primitive Man lived like that, in the woods, in the darkness, out-witting the wild things, while the rain dripped, and the owl cried, and the ghost came out from the grave. Baldy Hill stole the last litter of the last she-wolf, to cross them with the King's hounds. He was in at the death of the last wild-boar. Sometimes, in looking at him, I think, that his ashen stake must have a flint head, with which, on moony nights, he still creeps out, to rouse, it may be, the mammoth in his secret valley, or a sabre-tooth tiger, still caved in the woods. Life may and does shoot out into exotic forms, which may and do flower and perish. Perhaps when all the other forms of English life are gone, the Baldy Hill form, the stock form, will abide, still striding, head bent, with an ashen stake, after some wild thing, that has meat, or fur, or is difficult, or dangerous, to tackle.

Old Baldy Hill, the game old cock,
Still wore knee-gaiters and a smock.
He bore a five-foot ashen stick
All scarred and frilled from many a click

Fox-Hunting

Beating in covert with his sons
To drive the pheasants to the guns.

His face was beaten by the weather
To wrinkled red like bellows leather.
He had a cold clear hard blue eye.
His snares made many a rabbit die.
On moony nights he found it pleasant
To stare the woods for roosting pheasant
Up near the tree-trunk on the bough.

He never trod behind a plough.
He and his two sons got their food
From wild things in the field and wood,
By snares, by ferrets put in holes,
By ridding pasture-land of moles ;
By keeping, beating, trapping, poaching
And spaniel and retriever-coaching.

He and his sons had special merits
In breeding and in handling ferrets.
Full many a snaky hob and jill
Had bit the thumbs of Baldy Hill.

He had no beard, but long white hair.
He bent in gait. He used to wear
Flowers in his smock, gold-clocks and peasen
And spindle-fruit in hunting season.

I hope that he may live to wear spindle fruit for many seasons to come. Hunting makes more people happy than anything I know. When people are happy together, I am quite certain, that they build up something eternal, something both beautiful and divine, which weakens the power of all evil things upon this life of men and women.

I wrote these words two years ago. I pull them out to-day after seeing once more the beauty of a fox-hunt. It has been a mild winter day, with sun and a westerly wind after a night of rain. Going down into the valley, the fields showed distinct, the trees in line, the grass dead, the earth in colour, in plough, under the black of the hedges, and fields of roots green and bright, exquisite to see. Far away, the line of the downs stood out in a bold and angry blue under the smoke of the sky. The sun shone over all this. The missel-thrushes sang in the ash-trees. Then waverings of starlings and finches came over the road to me, with little creakings and ejaculations.

Wondering what had driven the birds over, I stopped, and heard in the field beyond the smack of a whip and the rate of a huntsman's voice, "Yah—Milkmaid," and there was the hunt coming over the pasture to the spinney. They were coming through a field grown about with thorn and high gorse, the gorse in Christmas blossom, and both gorse and thorn wet and dark

Fox-Hunting

from the rain. As I first saw them, they were coming out of a darkness into the light. The huntsman wore new scarlet, a little flecked with mud from the going. He rode a most noble dark brown hunter, who picked his way like a prince, and chafed, and burned his heart out for a find. The whip and the field went off upwind to the spinney end, while the huntsman took his hounds into cover, and gave them a note on his horn that went into men's hearts like a flake of fire.

In less than a minute, the hounds were through the little spinney and away over the plough to draw the woods beyond. The field loitered on behind them, in an Indian file, along the drain of the plough. The scarlet of the hunt gave a beauty the more to the fields, the earth, the roots, and the black lines of the thorns. The water in the drain flashed about the horses' feet like little wings of fire.

In a minute or two they had passed into and through the wood, and so on to the bigger covers. I saw the soft scarlet bob away out of sight with horsemen in Indian file loitering after.

All along the road, for the next two miles, I saw watchers at hedges, or standing in carts and cars, trying to catch a glimpse of them. In one field of roots, a shoot both guns and keepers, had left its sport and had climbed up a rise to see the greater sport. They stood there with their spaniels,

staring. In one ploughed field, three plough-teams were halted against the sky, like bronzes of patience, while the ploughmen stood in the hedges watching.

All these were kindled and cheered by the beauty and glory of the horses, the colour, life and manhood of the sport, and the sympathy that linked that world to friendship and fellowship. Religion moved thus once, so did poetry.

JOHN M. SYNGE

I FIRST met John M. Synge at the room of a common friend, up two pairs of stairs, in an old house in Bloomsbury, on a Monday night of January, 1903. When I entered the room, he was sitting in a rush-bottomed chair, talking to a young man just down from Oxford. My host introduced me, with the remark that he wanted us to know each other.

Synge stood up to shake hands with me. He was of the middle height, about five feet eight or nine. My first impression of him was of a dark, grave face, with a great deal in it, changing from the liveliness of conversation to a gravity of scrutiny. After we had shaken hands, I passed to the other end of the room to greet other friends. We did not speak to each other again that night.

When I sat at the other end of the room my chair was opposite Synge's chair. Whenever I raised my eyes I saw him, and wondered who he could be. I know now that he was guarded, because life had once hurt him, and quiet because he was of low vitality, but in spite of his reserve he gave from the first the impression of a strange personality. He was of a dark type

of Irishman, though not black-haired. Something in his air gave one the fancy that his face was dark from gravity. Gravity filled the face and haunted it, as though the man behind were for ever listening to life's case before passing judgment. It was "a dark, grave face, with a great deal in it." The hair was worn neither short nor long. The moustache was rather thick and heavy. The lower jaw, otherwise clean-shaven, was made remarkable by a tuft of hair, too small to be called a goatee, upon the lower lip. The head was of a good size. There was nothing niggardly, nothing abundant about it. The face was pale, the cheeks were rather drawn. In my memory they were rather seamed and old-looking. The eyes were at once smoky and kindling. The mouth, not well seen below the moustache, had a great play of humour on it. But for this humorous mouth, the kindling in the eyes, and something not robust in his build, he would have been more like a Scotchman than an Irishman.

I remember wondering if he were Irish. His voice, very guttural and quick, with a kind of lively bitterness in it, was of a kind of Irish voice new to me at that time. I had known a good many Irish people; but they had all been vivacious and picturesque, rapid in intellectual argument, and vague about life. There was nothing vivacious,

John M. Synge

picturesque, rapid or vague about Synge. The rush-bottomed chair next to him was filled by talker after talker, but Synge was not talking, he was answering. When someone spoke to him he answered with grave guarded courtesy. He offered nothing of his own. When the talk became general he was silent. Sometimes he went to a reddish earthenware pot upon the table, took out a cigarette and lit it at a candle. Then he sat smoking, pushed back a little from the circle, gravely watching. Sometimes I heard his deep, grave voice assenting "Ye-es; ye-es," with meditative boredom. Sometimes his little finger flicked off the ash on to the floor. His manner was that of a man too much interested in the life about him to wish to be more than a spectator. His interest was in life, not in ideas. He was new to that particular kind of life. Afterwards, when I had come to know him, I heard him sum up every person there with extraordinary point and sparkle. Often since then, eager to hear more of my friend, I have asked men who met him casually for a report of him. So often they have said, "He was a looker-on at life. He came in and sat down and looked on. He gave nothing in return. He never talked, he only listened. I never got much out of him. I never got to the real Synge. I was never conscious of what he felt. Sometimes I felt that there was nothing in him. I never knew him

respond. I never knew him do or say anything to suggest what he was in himself." When I hear these phrases, I know that those who utter them really met Synge. His place was outside the circle, gravely watching, gravely summing up, with a brilliant malice, the fools and wise ones inside.

A week, or perhaps a fortnight, later, I met him again at the same place, among the same people. He was talking brightly and charmingly to a woman. Men usually talk their best to women. When I turn over my memories of him, it seems that his conversation was gayest when he was talking to women. His talk to women had a lightness and charm; but perhaps he never much cared to talk even to women. He liked people to talk to him. He liked to know the colours of people's minds. He liked to be amused. His merriest talk was like playing catch with an apple of banter, which one afterwards ate and forgot.

He never tried to be brilliant. I never heard him say a brilliant thing. He said shrewd things. I do not know what he could have done if stirred to talk. Few people born out of old, sunny countries talk well. I never heard him engaged with a brilliant talker, either man or woman. He told me that once, in Paris, he had gone to hear a brilliant talker—a French poet, now dead. It was like him

that he did not speak to the talker. "We sat round on chairs and the great man talked."

During the evening, I spoke a few words to Synge about some Irish matter. We pushed back our chairs out of the circle and discussed it. I did not know at that time that he was a writer. I knew by name most of the writers in the Irish movement. Synge was not one of the names. I thought that he must be at work on the political side. I wronged him in this. He never played any part in politics : politics did not interest him. He was the only Irishman I have ever met who cared nothing for either the political or the religious issue. He had a prejudice against one Orange district, because the people in it were dour. He had a prejudice against one Roman Catholic district, because the people in it were rude. Otherwise his mind was untroubled. Life was what interested him. He would have watched a political or religious riot with gravity, with pleasure in the spectacle, and malice for the folly. He would have taken no side, and felt no emotion, except a sort of pity when the losers could go on no longer. The question was nothing to him. All that he asked for was to hear what it made people say and to see what it made people do.

Towards one in the morning, our host asked Synge and me to sup with him. We foraged in the pantry, and found some eggs, but nothing in

was working. He handed me a black tobacco-pouch and a packet of cigarette-papers. While I rolled a cigarette he searched for his photographs and at last handed them to me. They were quarter-plate prints in a thick bundle. There must have been fifty of them. They were all of the daily life of Aran; women carrying kelp, men in hookers, old people at their doors, a crowd at the landing-place, men loading horses, people of vivid character, pigs and children playing together, etc. As I looked at them he explained them or commented on them in a way which made all sharp and bright. His talk was best when it was about life or the ways of life. His mind was too busy with the life to be busy with the affairs or the criticism of life. His talk was all about men and women and what they did and what they said when life excited them. His mind was perhaps a little like Shakespeare's. We do not know what Shakespeare thought: I do not know what Synge thought. I don't believe anybody knew, or thinks he knows.

"There was something very nice about Synge." The friend who said this to me, added that "though the plays are cynical, he was not cynical in himself." I do not feel that the plays are cynical. They seem heartless at first sight. The abundant malicious zest in them gives them an air of cruelty. But in the plays, Synge did with his

John M. Synge

personality as he did in daily life. He buried his meaning deep. He covered his tragedy with mockeries.

More than a year ago a friend asked me what sort of man Synge was. I answered, "a perfect companion." The other day I saw that another friend, who knew him better than I, had described him as "the best companion." After that first day, when I called upon him at his room, we met frequently. We walked long miles together, generally from Bloomsbury to the river, along the river to Vauxhall, and back by Westminster to Soho. We sometimes dined together at a little French restaurant, called the Restaurant des Gourmets. The house still stands; but it has now grown to five times the size. The place where Synge and I used to sit has now been improved away. We spent happy hours there, talking, rolling cigarettes, and watching the life. "Those were great days," he used to say. He was the best companion for that kind of day.

Our talk was always about life. When we talked about writers (modern French and ancient English writers) it was not about their writings that we talked, but about the something kindling in them, which never got expressed. His theory of writing was this:—"No good writer can ever be translated." He used to quote triumphantly from Shakespeare's 130th Sonnet.

“ As any she belied with false compare.”

“ How would you put that into French ? ” he asked.

He never talked about himself. He often talked of his affairs, his money, his little room in Paris, his meetings with odd characters, etc., but never of himself. He had wandered over a lot of Europe. He was silent about all that.

Very rarely, and then by chance, when telling of the life in Aran, or of some strange man in the train or in the steamer, he revealed little things about himself :—

“ They asked me to fiddle to them, so that they might dance.”

“ Do you play, then ? ”

“ I fiddle a little. I try to learn something different for them every time. The last time I learned to do conjuring tricks. They'd get tired of me if I didn't bring something new. I'm thinking of learning the penny whistle before I go again.”

I never heard him mention his early life nor what he endured in his struggles to find a form. I believe he never spoke about his writings, except to say that he wrote them slowly, many times over. His talk was always about vivid, picturesque, wild life. He took greater joy in what some frantic soul from Joyce's country said when the policeman

John M. Synge

hit him than in anything of his own. Knowing almost nothing of England he disliked her. I think he only knew London. Afterwards he stayed for a couple of weeks in Devonshire. London always made him ill; he took a gloomy view of Devon. He was never in any part of England where the country life is vigorous and picturesque. Dislike of England had been bred into him; he had not a strong enough personal life to enable him to conquer his prejudice. He was of English descent. Soon after our first meeting I was present at his first success. His two early plays, "Riders to the Sea" and "The Shadow of the Glen," were read aloud to about a dozen friends at the rooms of one who was always most generously *helpful to writers not yet sure of their road*. A lady read the plays very beautifully. Afterwards we all applauded. Synge learned his *métier* that night. Until then, all his work had been tentative and in the air. After that, he went forward, knowing what he could do.

For two or three months I met Synge almost daily. Presently he went back to Ireland (I believe to Aran) and I to "loathed Devonshire." I met him again, later in the year. During the next few years, though he was not often in town, I met him fairly often whenever the Irish players came to London. Once I met him for a few days together in Dublin. He was to have stayed with

I saw him in his box, "sitting still," as he said, watching with the singular grave intensity with which he watched life. It struck me then that he was the only person there sufficiently simple to be really interested in living people; and that it was this simplicity which gave him his charm. He found the life in a man very well worth wonder, even though the man were a fool, or a knave, or a boy-critic. At the end of the play I saw him standing in his box, gravely watching the actors as the curtain rose and again rose during the applause. Presently he turned away to speak to the lady who had read his plays on the night of his first success. The play was loudly applauded. Some people behind me—a youth and a girl—began to hiss. I remember thinking that they resembled the bird they imitated. I only saw Synge on two other occasions. I met him at a dinner party, but had no talk with him, and I called upon him at his old lodgings in Handel Street. He said:—

"Doesn't it seem queer to you to be coming back here?"

"It seems only the other day that we were here."

"Those were great days."

"I wish we could have them again."

"Ah," he said, laughing his hard laugh, half a cough,

John M. Synge

"Nature brings not back the mastodon,
Nor we those times."

Presently he told me that he had been writing poetry. He handed me a type-written copy of a ballad, and asked me what I thought of it. I told him that I felt the want of an explanatory stanza near the beginning. "Yes," he said. "But I can't take your advice, because then it would not be quite my own." He told me the wild picturesque story (of a murder in Connaught) which had inspired the ballad. His relish of the savagery made me feel that he was a dying man clutching at life, and clutching most wildly at violent life, as the sick man does. We went out shortly afterwards, and got into a cab, and drove to the Gourmets, and ate our last meal together. He was going to the theatre after dinner ; I had to go out of town. After dinner we got into another cab. He said he would give me a lift towards my station. We drove together along the Strand, talking of the great times we would have and of the jolly times we had had. None of our many talks together was happier than the last. I felt in my heart as we drove that I should never see him again. Our last talk together was to be a happy one.

He was later than he thought. He could not come all the way to my station. He had to turn off to his theatre.

At the top of Fleet Street hill we shook hands and said " So long " to each other. The cab drew up just outside the office of a sporting newspaper. I got out, and raised my hand to him. He raised his in his grave way. The cab swung round and set off westwards, and that was the end.

When I heard of his death I felt that his interest in life would soon get itself into another body, and come here again to look on and listen. When a life ends, it is a sign that Nature's purpose in that life is over. When a personality has passed from us it is a sign that life has no further need of it. What that personality did may matter. What that personality was does not matter. Man's task is to leave the dead alone. Life would be finer if we did not drag that caddisworm's house of the past behind us.

I have not set down all my memories of him. Much of what he told and said to me was told and said in the confidence of friendship. I have set down only a few odd fragments to show those who care to know what sort of a man he was. Lies and lives will be written of him ; plenty of both. Enough should be said to defeat the malice and stupidity of detractors. Those who want to know what he was like, to talk to, should read the poems. The poems are the man speaking. They are so like him that to read them is to hear him. The
ruplet—

John M. Synge

" But they are rotten (I ask their pardon),
And we've the sun on rock and garden."

gives me, whenever I read it, the feeling that he is in the room, looking up with his hard, quick guttural laugh and kindling eyes, from the rolling of a cigarette. The issue of "Samhain" for December, 1904, contains a portrait of him by Mr. J. B. Yeats. It is difficult to believe that there can be any portrait more like him.

I wrote down these memories in January and February, 1911, two years after Synge's death, and three and a half years after I had parted from him. They were printed in the "Contemporary Review" for April, 1911, and are reprinted here through the kindness of the Editor and Proprietors, whom I wish to thank. Some years have passed since I wrote this account, and in reading it over to-day one or two little things, as the use of particular words in what I quote from him, etc., have made me pause, as possibly inexact. I have not altered these things, because, when I wrote this account, my memory of the events and words was sharper than it is to-day. Memory is a bad witness, and inexact in very little things, such as the precise words used in talk some years before. The reader must however believe that the words

quoted, if not the very words used by Synge, are as near to the very words as my memory can make them.

I have been asked to add to these memories a few notes, and the chief dates in Synge's life, as far as we know them. His life, like that of any other artist, was dated not by events but by sensations. I know no more of his significant days than the rest of the world, but the known biographical facts are these.

He was born on 16th April, 1871, at Newtown Little, near Dublin. He was the youngest son and eighth child of John Hatch Synge, barrister, and of Kathleen, his wife (born Traill). His father died in 1872. His mother in 1908. He went to private schools in Dublin and in Bray, but being seldom well, left school when about fourteen and then studied with a tutor ; was fond of wandering alone in the country, noticing birds and wild life, and later took up music, piano, flute and violin. All through his youth, he passed his summer holidays in Annamoe, Co. Wicklow, a strange place, which influenced him.

He entered Trinity College, Dublin, on June 18, 1888, won prizes in Hebrew and Irish in Trinity Term, 1892, and took his B.A. degree (second class) in December, 1892. While at Trinity he studied music at the Royal Irish

Academy of Music, where he won a scholarship in Harmony and Counterpoint.

He left College undecided about a career, but was inclined to make music his profession. He went to Germany (Coblentz and Würzburg) to study music ; but in 1894, owing to a disappointed love, he gave up this, and went to Paris, with some thought of becoming a writer. He was much in France for the next few years writing constantly to little purpose ; he went to Italy in 1896, and in May 1898 made his first visit to the Aran Islands. During this visit he began the first drafts of the studies which afterwards grew to be his book, " The Aran Islands." His writings, up to this time, had been tentative and imitative, being mainly reflections from (and upon) what had most struck him in his reading. He had read considerably in some six languages (Hebrew, Irish, German, Italian, French and English), and widely in at least four of them, besides his scholarship in the universal language of music. Among his early plans for books were schemes for a translation from some of the prose of St. Francis of Assisi (which he abandoned, because an English translation was published at the time), and for a critical study of Racine, whose pure and noble art always meant much to him. Some critical and other writings of this period exist in manuscript. They are said to be carefully written, but wanting in inner impulse.

Throughout this period if not throughout his life he lived with the utmost ascetic frugality, bordering always, or touching, on poverty. He used to say that his income was "forty pounds a year and a new suit of clothes, when my old ones get too shabby." He had no expensive habits, he was never self-indulgent, he had no wish to entertain nor to give away, no desire to make nor to own money, no taste for collection nor zest for spending. He eschewed all things that threatened his complete frugal independence and thereby the integrity of his mind.

The superficial man, not seeing this last point, sometimes felt that he "did not know how to abound."

When in Paris in 1899, he met Mr. W. B. Yeats who, having seen his work, suggested that he would do well to give up writing criticism, and go again to the Aran Islands to study the life there, and fill his mind with real and new images, so that, if he wrote later, his writing might be lively and fresh and his subject a new discovery. He did as Mr. Yeats suggested and went back to the Aran Islands and passed some weeks in Inishmaan. In all, he made five or six visits to the Aran Islands, these two of 1898 and 1899, and certainly three more in the autumns of 1900, 1901, 1902. The Islanders liked him but were a little puzzled by him. He was an unassertive, unassuming man,

John M. Synge

with a genius for being inconspicuous. He has told us that his usual method in a poor man's cabin was to make them forget that he was there, but in Aran on these visits he always tried to add to the fun and to his personal prestige, with conjuring tricks, fiddling, piping, taking photographs, etc. Some of the Islanders were much attached to him. I suppose that their main impression was that he was a linguist who had committed a crime somewhere and had come to hide.

His next three or four years, 1899-1902, were passed between Paris and Ireland ; Paris in the winter and spring and Ireland in the other seasons. He was at work on "The Aran Islands," and on his three early one-act plays, "The Tinker's Wedding," "Riders to the Sea," and "The Shadow of the Glen." He came to London in the winter of 1902-3, where I saw him as I have described. London did not suit him and he did not stay long. He gave up his room in Paris at this time, with some searching of the heart ; for at thirty one clings to youth. After this, he was mostly in Ireland, in the wilder West and elsewhere ; writing and perfecting. At the end of 1904 he was in Dublin, for the opening of the Abbey Theatre, then founded by Miss Horniman, a generous English lady. In June, 1905, he went through the Congested Districts of Connemara, with Mr. Jack B. Yeats. After this expedition,

which lasted a month, he was generally in or near Dublin, in Kingstown and elsewhere, though he made summer excursions to Dingle, the Blasket Islands, Kerry, etc. About once a year, when the Abbey Theatre Company was touring in England, he came with it if his health allowed, to watch the performances in London, Manchester, or Edinburgh, wherever they might be. His life was always mainly within himself; the record of these years is very meagre, all that can be said of them is that he passed them mostly in Ireland, writing and re-writing, in failing health and with increasing purpose. His general health was never robust, and for at least the last six years of his life his throat troubled him. He used to speak of the trouble as "his glands"; I cannot learn its exact nature; but I have been told that it was "cancer" or "some form of cancer," which caused him "not very great pain," but which "would have been excessively painful had he lived a little longer." Doctors may be able to conclude from these vague statements what it was. He was operated upon in May, 1908, but the growth could not be removed, and from that time on he was under sentence of death. He passed his last few months of life trying to finish his play of "Deirdre" and writing some of his few poems. He died in a private nursing home in Dublin on the 24th March, 1909, and was buried

John M. Synge

two days later in a family vault in the Protestant graveyard of Mount Jerome, Harold's Cross, Dublin. He had been betrothed, but not married.

One thing more needs to be said. People have stated that Synge's masters in art were the writers of the French Decadent school of the eighteen nineties, Verlaine, Mallarmé, J. K. Huysmans, etc. Others, trying to defend him against this charge, have stated that he had never read these writers. Synge had read these writers (who has not?). I often talked of them with him. So far as I know, they were the only writers for whom he expressed dislike. As a craftsman he respected their skill, as an artist he disliked their vision. His knowledge and dislike of them are plainly stated in his review of Huysmans' "*La Cathedrale*" (*The Speaker*, April, 1903) and in an allusion to the same author's "*A Rebours*," in one of his Prefaces. I do not know who his masters in art may have been, that is one of the personal things he would not willingly have told; but from what I can remember, I should say that his favourite author, during the greater part of his life, was Racine.

P O R T R A I T S

Several portraits of Synge exist. Besides a few drawings of him which are still in private hands, there are these, which have been made public.

An oil painting by Mr. J. B. Yeats, R.H.A.
(Municipal Gallery, Dublin.)

A Drawing by Mr. J. B. Yeats, R.H.A.
("Samhain." December, 1904.)

A Drawing by Mr. J. B. Yeats, R.H.A.
(Frontispiece to "Playboy.")

Frontispieces to Vols. I, III and IV of "The Works." (One of these is a drawing by Mr. James Paterson, the others are photographs.)

Two small but characteristic amateur photographs reproduced in M. Bourgeois's book.

Very few people can read a dead man's character from a portrait. Life is our concern; it was very specially Synge's concern. Doubtless he would prefer us not to bother about how he looked, but to think of him as one who

John M. Synge

A LIST OF HIS PLAYS

In chronological order, with the dates of their first performances

The Shadow of the Glen. Written 1902-3, performed 8th October, 1903.

Riders to the Sea. Written 1902-3, performed 25th February, 1904.

The Well of the Saints. Written 1903-4, performed 4th February, 1905.

The Playboy of the Western World. Written 1905-6, performed 26th January, 1907.

The Tinker's Wedding. Written 1902-1907, performed 11th November, 1909.

Deirdre of the Sorrows (unfinished), 1907-8, performed 13th January, 1910.

OTHER WRITINGS

The Aran Islands. Written between 1899 and 1907, published April, 1907.

Poems and Translations. Written between 1891 and 1908; the translations between 1905 and 1908, published June 5, 1909.

The Works of John M. Synge, in four volumes, published in 1910: contains all the published plays and books and selections from his papers. Though he disliked writing for newspapers he wrote some contributions to *The Gael*, *The Shanachie*, *The Speaker*, *The Manchester Guardian* and *L'Européen* (in Paris) between the years 1902 and 1908. One or two of the best of these are reprinted in *John M. Synge's Works*. The others may be read in their place by those who care. It is possible that the zeal of biographers will discover a few papers by him in other periodicals.

A NOTE

INFORMATION about John M. Synge may be found in Mr. W. B. Yeats' *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, p. 173. In *J. M. Synge and the Ireland of His Time*, by W. B. Yeats and Jack B. Yeats. In an article by Mr. Jack B. Yeats in the *New York Sun*, July, 1909, mainly reprinted in the above. In *The Manchester Guardian*, March 25th, 1909, and, much more fully than elsewhere, in *John Millington Synge*, by M. Maurice Bourgeois, the French authority on Synge. A good many critical and controversial books and articles of varying power and bitterness have appeared about him. A short Life of him by myself, was published in a supplementary volume of the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1912. The people who knew him in Ireland, and some who have followed in his tracks there have set down or collected facts about him. The student will no doubt meet with more of these as time goes by. For those which have already appeared, the student should refer to M. Bourgeois's appendices, and to the published indices of English and American periodical publications.